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**PARIS**  
**1870-1935**





THE BALL AT THE ELYSÉE, JANUARY 23, 1877  
The Marshal and Madame MacMahon receiving their guests

# PARIS

1870-1935

*by*

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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION

THIS book is not a history—that is to say, it is not a chronological procession of the facts which have occurred during the life of the Third Republic from 1870 to our own times. It is rather an attempt to reconstruct the atmosphere of the successive periods, or, as it is fashionable to say now, the social “climates” of the last half-century or so.

The atmosphere of a period is something so very peculiar to it that it is not at all easy to recapture or define. It may be described as the sum-total obtained by adding together the historical facts, the social occurrences, and the most trivial details of the life of a people at any given moment. All kinds of things must necessarily come into such a microcosm: clothes, changes of manners and social habit, ways of thought and turns of phrase, fashions in sentiment, conceptions of life and death, philosophical and religious beliefs, and material preoccupations of every sort and kind. If fashions in food and clothes reveal the character of an epoch, a zest for pleasure and a contempt for suffering do so no less.

We might call the picture obtained by assembling these traits the physiognomy of a period; taken over a century or so, it gives us the atmosphere.

The reader of this book will not find an explanation of exactly how M. Clemenceau got into power for the first time, or just why General Boulanger failed to bring off a *coup d'état*, nor will he learn how the Allies won the war of 1914. But he will discover what men were feeling and saying about the Panama crisis; what sort of hold Boulanger had over the people; and what life was like behind the front during the years 1914–18, and in that

It will be noticed that the thing which most of all conveys the exact feeling of an epoch is often something very trivial and elusive: a certain fact, a certain manifestation of sentiment, not very significant in itself, but cropping up repeatedly in a number of places. It may be just a catchword or a phrase, but it reveals a state of mind. Those words so universally repeated during the war, whenever and wherever the Germans were under discussion, "*Ils ne passeront pas*" and "*On les aura*," at once created and enshrined the national temper.

Among the trivial but characteristic social occurrences which bear and give the hall-mark to their time may be mentioned, among sartorial matters, the appearance of women in bloomers, which survived the bicycling craze and became a symbol of feminine emancipation. The disappearance of the tall hat and the frock-coat after the war similarly marks the coming of less formal and more democratic manners.

The atmosphere of every period has something about it which invests all the figures of the time, a kind of uniform tint which colours them all. Everything about the year 1935 reflects the prevailing disquiet. Social, moral, and political unrest agitates every class of society, and it is quite impossible to escape from it. The unrest of the Boulangist period was something quite different; there was a gaiety and light-heartedness about the period, and even the unrest found its characteristic outlet in street-songs. The post-war years reflected a gaiety of a quite different kind, a savage determination to make up for the terrible years just passed through, the unchaining of discipline and restraint, and few people could resist being caught up in it. One could go on indefinitely citing such examples; every page of history bears witness to the climate in which it was written.

The author's sole intention in these pages is to recapture these different and successive atmospheres. One after another he has known them all, and he has drawn on his

memories to re-live them. If he is able to give that illusion to his readers, if they can feel that they too have lived close to the heart of Paris during the last fifty years of her existence, his purpose will have been well served.

JULES BERTAUT

PARIS

*November 1935*



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## CHAPTER I

### PARIS AFTER THE COMMUNE

THE fall of the Second Empire in France was like the abrupt descent of the curtain on a brilliant spectacle in full swing. Stunned by surprise, the audience saw the footlights extinguished and darkness suddenly engulf the stage; and then, without an interval, the curtain rose again on the war-scarred landscape and the smoking ruins of the Commune.

The rapidity of the change produced a state of affairs which cannot be compared with anything else, certainly not with the conditions prevailing after the war of 1914-18. The protraction of this latter, its innumerable crises publicly discussed throughout those four dreary years, the daily adjustment of social habit noted at the time by witnesses—all combined to consummate the social revolution of 1914-18 almost without a jar to our consciousness. But in 1871, on the contrary, although the external framework was shattered suddenly, little alteration in social life was apparent for several years. There was no Empire and no Court, but everywhere else there were the same people doing the same things. The old scenery had gone and so had the producer, but the majority of the cast, from the principals down to the crowd, had been retained. So the play went on just the same; people hardly noticed any difference.

But the new scene was not particularly entrancing. The Commune had literally bludgeoned the country senseless: it had finished with a vengeance what the months of war had begun. In some parts of France the rising, whose garbled details alone had filtered through, was regarded merely as a Bonapartist counterplot, a repetition of those June days with their cry of "We want Napoleon." Nothing was known of the demands of the revolutionaries; people did not even know their names. Towns like Lyons and Marseilles were in the same state of ignorance and confusion. The Préfet of Saint-Étienne



was assassinated as a reactionary at the very moment when he was about to be removed by the existing powers on account of his "advanced" tendencies. Uncertainty, fear, and confusion paralysed the country, increasing in direct ratio as the radius of Paris was approached; for there, from the Point du Jour, began the long line of gaping roofs, battered walls, and charred frontages. In the Champs-Élysées yawned the roofless Palais de l'Industrie, in the Place de la Concorde was the Hôtel de Ville, or rather what had been the Hôtel de Ville and was now a shapeless heap of rubble and stones. Whole streets had disappeared entirely. Some of the most beautiful monuments of Paris were dissolved into formless eruptions clinging to blackened walls. The Ministry of Finance was a rubbish-heap; of the Vendôme Column only the base remained. The Palais de la Légion d'Honneur and the Cour des Comptes had suffered a similar evil fate. The magnificent square flanked by the Louvre gave through the Arcs de Triomphe of the Place Carrousel and l'Étoile, a desolate vista across to the gutted Tuileries. A little farther on the Palais de Justice had been entirely wiped out, and a lingering cloud of smoke hovered like a pall over the still smouldering site of the Hôtel de Ville.

The ravaged capital was still under martial law. Until the 3rd of June 1871 it had been impossible to go in or out without a permit; curfew was enforced at eleven; and the mounted patrols, their revolvers ready, rode ceaselessly up and down the deserted streets. The theatres were closed and the shops were shuttered; no one even cried newspapers. Every soldier was ordered to keep his rifle ready, and the ambulance men, with their tricoloured brassards, moved silently along bearing the injured and the wounded. An acrid smell of burning hung over the city day and night. Now and then the empty streets echoed to the rattle of gun-fire: more rioters were being shot.

Those who went out looked fearfully for their friends as men search among corpses on the battle-field. Sometimes they did not know each other when they met; the

privations and sufferings of the siege had aged them unrecognizably.

Among the little things which gradually brought home to the Parisians that the double nightmare of war and revolution had passed was the reappearance of white bread. Bread for them meant the blackish substance of straw-like consistency which they had thought themselves lucky to get for so many months. An eyewitness records that a little girl carrying a fresh white roll in her hand down the rue Richelieu found that she was being followed by a dozen people gaping at the unbelievable marvel which she held.<sup>1</sup>

The Palais Royal was an armed camp. Soldiers under the arcades, soldiers in the Galérie d'Orléans, soldiers in the courtyards, soldiers everywhere. A favourite amusement of the slowly recovering citizens was to go out and see the open-air camps. The kitchen was particularly popular; a curious crowd gazed earnestly at the preparation of the ration—soup, rice, stew, and potatoes. "The soldier cooks," says an eyewitness, "were always ready to oblige the crowd by going through an elaborate ritual of tasting the soup in the great iron pots. The performance always brought them a drink."

But if the scars of battle were noticeable in the centre of the town they showed even more plainly in the working-class quarters. Around Belleville the barricades still remained, and gutted houses, shutters wrenched off or hanging, doors staved in and windows shattered gave the appearance of a town sacked by the enemy. Sacked, but not reprieved; for in these silent streets and in these cafés, where sullen-faced men drank mirthlessly, brooded an atmosphere of evil discontent. Groups of soldiers promenaded the streets with guns on their shoulders, flourishing staffs made from the stocks of the insurgents' rifles, and in the suburban streets little groups of red-trousered soldiers camped under the meagre trees, whose bullet-riddled branches were hung with the heterogeneous contents of their knapsacks.

For some days now the guns had been silent; here

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Dreyfous: *Ce qu'il me reste à dire*. (Paris, 1913.)

and there came a stray fusillade, and a dull detonation occasionally as the last remaining walls of a building collapsed in a cloud of dust.

Over all the June sky continued relentlessly blue.

. . . . .

On the 3rd of June civilians were allowed to come and go without permits, and from that moment the curtain rose on the new Paris.

The people came in crowds—on foot, in carriages, by rail and by steamer, their excited curiosity leaping all social barriers. Most of them were Parisians who had been immured in the nearer suburbs, chiefly in Versailles, during the siege and the Commune. Back they came “carrying their bags” and arousing the ire of Edmond de Goncourt, who noted bitterly, “I am astounded at their provincialism. I couldn’t have believed that eight months’ absence from the centre of *chic* could have destroyed so completely the supposedly ineradicable Parisian qualities.”<sup>1</sup>

The repatriated citizens had only one idea—to go and see the ruins. Hardly troubling to see if their homes were safe, they poured out in hordes to gaze at the Ministry of Finance, the Hôtel de Ville, and the other demolished public buildings. They became connoisseurs of the aesthetic of demolition; they remarked on this or that bizarre effect of a fire or an explosion; they chattered, nosed, gaped, rumoured, invented and explained. A few were positively disappointed.

“It isn’t as bad as they made out. Quite a lot of places are untouched.”

“Isn’t it enough for you?”

“Well, everybody has their own troubles. You wouldn’t believe what we went through. . . . In Versailles they were asking two hundred francs for a miserable little back room—downright robbery.”

Uncommiserated among the curious went the people who had lost their homes, gloomy-eyed and tight-lipped, sometimes muttering curses under their breath. If the

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Goncourt, années 1870-71.* (Paris, Fasquelle ed.)

crowd noticed them at all it was to remark that there were still a lot of dangerous characters about: "Look at that fellow's face. I bet he's a Communard."

But this was only the advance guard of those who wanted to see the ruins. As the last shot was fired across the barricades, the English tourist agencies began an intensive advertisement of pleasant tours in the devastated areas. Towards the end of June groups of the indefatigable islanders, complete with field-glasses and sketch-books, began to mingle with the crowds of Parisians and provincials on the boulevards. The elderly whiskered gentlemen and the young misses fingered the blackened stones; some gathered up charred papers and other fragments that had presumably escaped the holocaust; others put odds and ends in their pockets, doubtless in case they should get out of practice.

It was the Yankees' turn next. The New York steamers brought hordes of them and their wives and their blonde daughters, "doing" the devastated town at a moderate inclusive rate.

The oldest inhabitants marvelled and said, "Really, I've never known Paris so full in the summer."

The anaesthetized city had come to life, suddenly and completely.

Although the Germans still remained in the outer fortifications the town had begun to resume its customary routine. The carriages came out again in the afternoons, the streets were crowded all the time, and at the beginning of July we find the newspapers complaining that the press of carriages was holding up the traffic between three and five p.m.

And the beggars reappeared. "Most of them," says *Figaro*, "are armed with violins or accordions, pursuing the passers-by with an interminable and intolerable 'Marseillaise'. At least they might play the 'Chant du Départ'!"

The cab-drivers resumed normal activities, and the plaint of the mulcted fare was heard on every hand. The papers were full of letters from persons who had been charged three and four times the proper rate.

But there was still a scarcity of policemen. Despite public agitation, another month was to pass before the regular force could be re-established.

The wildest and most diverse rumours were freely circulated. It was said that Paris was full of plague-infested houses, that bands of revolutionaries were hidden in cellars waiting a favourable opportunity to leap out on peaceful citizens, that the Louvre was mined and would go up at any moment, that M. Thiers had been assassinated (with full circumstantial details), that Henri Rochefort had escaped, that Gambetta had been poisoned, and that the Empress Eugénie had landed at Bordeaux with the Prince Imperial.

It was easy enough to find credulous ears among the inhabitants of the still-smoking city. "Paris is nothing but a forcing-house of rumour," writes Philip Audebrand. The newspapers themselves were merely letter-boxes for the collection and dissemination of scaremongering missives.

Petrolphobia was the outstanding mania. Since the Commune, petrol had become the most noxious thing in creation. Some advocated its complete prohibition; others wanted it licensed. Yet others favoured a house-to-house visitation to track down the sinister stuff, those found in possession of it to be arrested, tried, and condemned out of hand.

Public opinion also waxed hot about the ruins. It was suggested that they were a national disgrace and that work should be carried on night and day to restore them. Gangs of Communards under armed guards were to be compelled to mend the havoc they had made. Others recommended a conscription of the necessary labour from all parts of France; while another school of thought wanted the ruins left as they were—as a warning to future generations.

These were the questions hotly debated not only in the papers but in the cafés and in private. The life of the cafés had come back; the old, familiar faces bent over the tables at Tortoni's, at the Café de Madrid and the Café du Helder. Aurélien Scholl was re-established at the

centre table at Tortoni's, surrounded by his "henchmen", Albert Wolff, Chavette, Fromentin—all those who had been the arbiters of Parisian taste before the troubles, and who hoped now to resume their sway. They gossiped about the antipathy between Thiers and Gambetta, about Perrin leaving the Opéra for the Comédie Française, about the new piece at the Palais Royal, about Gounod, about Gérôme and Dubufe (the latter domiciled in England now), and about the fabulous sum (a million francs, it was said) that an Englishman had offered Meissonier to illustrate Molière. They talked also of Napoleon and of the Comte de Chambord, and those gallant spirits who were still considering discretion the better part of valour in their exile at Brussels.

Around them among the passers-by billowed the women, in the same flamboyant dresses that they had flaunted before the war: straw-coloured silks with green corsages or heliotrope sleeves, impertinent little hats loaded with crushed roses drowned in waves of black lace. Some still wore clusters of golden ringlets, others had substituted a more sober chignon of black hair on the nape of the neck. Their ample skirts were bedecked with lace flounces relieved by pipings and ruchings of silk, and they allowed a glimpse of fanciful boots. All the women with any pretensions to smartness carried little spaniels under their arms.

Catulle Mendès, who was about to publish his 73 *Journées de la Commune*, was at Brébant's, regaling his fellow-journalists with accounts of the harrowing scenes he had witnessed. Over them hovered the shadow of one who had fought on the other side of the barricades and who now lay in a felon's prison. Anecdotes of Rochefort passed from one to the other.

"He is in the prison down the rue St. Pierre, you know."

"Yes. He occupies a cell reserved for prisoners condemned to death, where there is no direct light."

"I saw in the *Figaro* that his condition is very serious. He hardly speaks and eats virtually nothing."

"The prison chaplain came to visit him the other day——"

de Paladines received a great ovation, but the enthusiasm of the crowd reached delirium when a new model gun appeared.

Some of them were shouting already, "We'll get our own back with that."

Madame Édouard Adam, who tells us that she got up at an "unbelievable hour" to be there with her husband, remarks, "Hope seemed to stream out with the sunshine. We could never, during that frightful war, have believed in such a recovery. But now we know it."

And Gambetta had tears in his eyes.

At a quarter to two Thiers arrived in a closed carriage and took his place in the Pavilion of Honour with the President of the National Assembly and the ministers. At two o'clock came Marshal MacMahon, and, passing in front of the troops, went over to take his place with his staff amid the salute of the guns. And then the review began. For nearly four hours the soldiers filed past (there were 80,000 of them) in impeccable style and to a crescendo of enthusiasm.

When the last soldier had marched away, the Marshal walked towards the Pavilion of Honour, where Thiers was seated, and the President of the Republic stepped down to meet him. Before all the people the soldier and the statesman embraced each other, driven by an overmastering emotion. A thunder of cheers split the air, every lung expanded with heroism, relief, and hope. The dark days were gone, and they believed in the future. "*Vive M. Thiers! Vive le Maréchal!*"

. . . . .

A day like that had an immediate effect on the pulse of Parisian life. The city rioted in new vitality. Paris went back to eat and drink largely, to open its theatres, to give parties and dances, and to crowd the clubs. The "season" was late, but that did not matter, the Bois was still impassable with carriages and promenaders. While the new Opera House was being finished the old one in the rue Le Peletier reopened triumphantly with Auber's *La Muette*. Halanzier had just been made director, and

began to rehearse Reyer's *Erostate*. The Gymnase put on Dumas fils's *La Visite de Noces*; the Palais Royal, *Tricocche et Cacolet*; the Bouffes-Parisiens, *Le Testament de M. le Grac*; l'Ambigu, *Les Nuits de Courtille*, a sombre drama by Marc Fournier. At the Gaiété, Thérèse reappeared in *La Chatte Blanche*, noticeably plumper but more vivacious than ever. Offenbach, who had fled the capital, was said to be returning.

Finally, Léon Say, the new Seine Prefect, filled the public cup of joy to overflowing by announcing that racing would be resumed in September, both in Paris and at Chantilly. That definitely meant peace to the multitude! And then, in the winter, there would be the balls again, and the gay little supper-parties. Yes, it was peace!

There were, however, still some melancholy moralists who persisted with inconvenient observations: "France in Mourning", "The Lost Provinces", "The Enemy still in France", "A Crushing Burden" (five milliards of debt), "Paris in Ruins".

But those stirring slogans which fortified our souls from 1914 to 1918 were even then being pressed into service: "Business as Usual", "War on Depression", "Luxury is France's Chief Industry", etc.

"Every Opéra Ball," wrote a statistician in the *Figaro*, "puts five million francs in circulation. At a time like the present such an argument must outweigh all others." There was in fact a great deal more realism and less hypocrisy than forty years afterwards; people were perfectly frank about their desire to forget their sufferings. Since the 1st of June *Figaro* had been pleading for the removal of the ambulance stations, "which do nothing but depress the city". Four months later it was said quite openly that all the histories and memoirs of the Commune were entirely worthless. There was a general demand that the military should stop explaining and let the public get on with the peace. "Why blacken so much paper with things we'd all forget?" sang the *Commère* in a popular revue. "Go on with your dirty washing, but we'll not whitewash you."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Robert Dreyfus: *Petite histoire de la Revue de fin d'année*. (Paris, 1909.)



Another scene in this revue introduced one of the more serious journalists to be castigated by the *Commère*. "Here is a man," she said, "who under the pretext of regeneration wishes to rob our city of its native gaiety, and to ride his hobby-horse of gloom over youth, life, and love." The offending journalist is expelled from the scene, amid loud cheers.

Ecstatic plaudits then usher in a glittering damsel who represents the Folies-Bergères. This representative of "youth, love, and life" is welcomed in the prevailing argot, and the scene closes with the following ditty:

Oui, mon établissement, tout comme l'Alhambra  
S'organise!  
Chez moi, on chante, on rit, on fume, et caetera. . . .  
Qu'on se l'dise

Baladzine . . . ohé, du flan-flan  
Moi, je suis les Folies-Bergères  
J'aim' pas ceux qui font des manières  
Viv' le plaisir, et allez donc!

This rather crude literary effort was a declaration of faith. It reflected public opinion and contemporary manners faithfully enough. Turning over the newspapers and memoirs of the period one finds no trace of anything but an almost ferocious desire to live at all costs and to wipe out the memory of the catastrophic year that had just passed. "War, revolutions, military intrigues, strategy, tactics, artillery, shells, petrol, we've had enough of them," cries Philibert Audebrand. "The theatres are open again, ladies and gentlemen, the Parisiennes are more seductive than ever, visitors are arriving in crowds, *and gaiety is in the air.*"

People dropped back into their old comfortable habits, and the habitual diners-out resumed their activities. Famous reunions announced the resumption of their sessions, and a gratified city treated these pronouncements with due respect: "The most important event of the month," writes *Figaro*, "is the resumption of the Spartiates' dinners, the first of which will take place

almost simultaneously with the reopening of the Opéra."

"These delightful dinners," writes Edmond de Goncourt, "where the wittiest of talkers initiate you into the gossip behind the scenes of the journalistic, financial, and political worlds of Paris and the choicest scandals of the boudoirs." Arsène Houssaye, and Paul de Saint-Victor, the author of *Manette Salomon*, were the life and soul of these reunions.

They were held at Brébant's, that prince of *restaurateurs*, and they included Jules Claretie, that unsilenceable raconteur, whose infallible journalist's nose invariably led him to the scene of the incidents which he described with such gusto; Gaston Jollivet, whose duty it was to follow the debates in the National Assembly, and who amused his companions by revealing all the little tricks of the great orators; Francis Magnard, then only a reporter, and Robert Mitchell, who gave his experiences as a prisoner of war in Germany, saying that his chief delight was to watch the German officers bullying their men on the parade-ground.

All these Spartiates—ironic misnomer—lived in a perpetual whirl of words. They talked, argued, disputed and pontificated about everything—the gossip of the boulevards and the theatres, art, letters, and social life. They would even talk about finance, shaking their heads over "the depreciation of French paper, the impossibility of paying the German debt, and the prospect of bankruptcy".<sup>1</sup>

Only one subject was taboo: they might not talk about politics. Any one infringing this rule was fined. It was, however, broken on one classic occasion by the "bibliophile Jacob",

"an amiable old dodderer whom nobody knew save by his nickname. He rose suddenly, his hands gripping the table-cloth, and launched at the astonished diners the opening lines of *L'Idole* (Auguste Barbier's anti-Bonapartist polemic):

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Goncourt.*

Ô Corse aux chevaux plats, que la France était belle  
Au grand soleil de Messidor.

"After which, shuffling through the following iambics which smoke with imprecations, the old man unloosed, with a hiss that rattled all his false teeth together, the final outburst in concentrated defiance of all the Bonapartists present:

Je n'ai jamais chargé qu'un homme de ma haine  
Sois maudit, Ô Napoléon!

"Henry Houssaye murmured in my ear: 'What a charge. The old bibliophile has evidently turned zouave.'

"His frenzy over, our man, who hadn't even the excuse of being drunk, exclaimed solemnly, 'I have unburdened my conscience.' After which he set down by his plate his share of the bill and the ten francs' fine which he had incurred, and went out.

"We never saw him again among the Spartiates, but, behold, a few months later, the old hypocrite decorated by Thiers with a rosette of the red ribbon instituted by the nephew of the said accursed lank-haired Corsican. He was an opportunist before the word became recognized at the front door of politics."<sup>1</sup>

But jarring episodes of this sort were rare among the Spartiates, whose dinners usually went off in that atmosphere of polished witty scandal which so delighted the soul of Edmond de Goncourt.

At the Opéra, the great attraction was Faure in Mozart's *Don Juan*, and *La Coupe du Roi de Thule*. Fioretti, Fiocre, Fonta, and Sangalli were the bright particular stars of the *corps de ballet*, and Thiers himself did not disdain to patronize the famous gala nights, surrounded by a bodyguard of friends and subscribers whose elegance, alas, was a long way removed from that of the old régime.

The trifling social events of the capital assumed immense importance in such an atmosphere. The return

<sup>1</sup> Gaston Jolivet: *Souvenirs d'un Parisien*. (Tallandier ed.)

of the Baroness Vigier, formerly that Sophie Cruvelli so loudly applauded on the boards in the rue Le Peletier, was a first-class sensation. Every one flocked to the four concerts she gave that season.

The money was flowing in too. The Opéra receipts, from its reopening down to the fire which destroyed it on October 28th 1873, were astounding. No wonder Halanzier rubbed his hands and conceded an honorarium of 30,000 francs to his *maître de ballet*, an event which nearly caused a riot in the green-room and provoked endless discussion in the newspapers.

But it was at the Comédie Française that the pulse of Parisian life beat highest. Perrin, who had just returned from London, had been appointed director, and he resolved to make the famous theatre more splendid than ever, and in particular, to make the celebrated Tuesday performances for subscribers events of the first social magnitude. To this end, he invited the collaboration of the Prince de Sagan, who was to scrutinize the list of proposed subscribers with the most scrupulous care and to exclude all who did not belong to the inner circle of Parisian society.

The prince did this with such thoroughness that even the most superior *demi-mondaines* were excluded. Then there was a fine outcry: "Subscription list! More like a proscription list."

All the pretty ladies stormed, wept, and cajoled, and their harassed protectors expostulated and pulled strings. But it was no use—they could get nothing out of de Sagan. "To a friend who reminded him that even the Opéra tolerated behind the stalls a sort of promenade, nicknamed the 'Aquarium', where gallant subscribers could gossip and admire no less *galante* ladies, the Prince remarked sardonically that one fishing-ground was enough." So the half-world had to bow to the decree. Those who had been "retained" or "inscribed" on the list naturally regarded it as a social triumph.

. . . . .

With work and pleasure now both in full swing, France

was next to demonstrate, before the enemy had yet quitted her soil, the fabulous reserves of her wealth. The occasion was the famous Liberty Loan.

This loan to pay the war indemnity, over which so much ink was to flow, had been mooted with trepidation and discussed with bated breath. That France could never discharge such a burden was the general refrain. Very few people were found to foretell its success; the majority were overwhelmingly pessimistic, and the word "bankruptcy" flowed from journalistic pens more freely than ever.

The country was astounded when the results were made known in August 1872.

"We needed three milliards to escape from the muzzle of the cannon and to free ourselves from the prick of the bayonet's point. The subscription replied by placing at our disposal forty-two milliards. . . . It is with something like fear that we have seen these colossal figures, whose like has never yet been realized anywhere or at any time, pile up and take shape. This stupendous sum is a revelation of our inmost forces which will astound the civilized world. In Paris alone more than twelve milliards were subscribed."

In flowing periods the journalists assessed and extolled the treasure of Golconda revealed by the excavations of M. Thiers. The name of Rothschild was mentioned everywhere; the important part which he had played in the preliminaries was recalled, together with the constant financial support which he had extended to the new régime. Anecdotes of him were circulated everywhere; a favourite was the story of a minister who had fallen from power during the last years of the Empire.

"Well, Monsieur le Baron," said the latter to Rothschild, "you won't be very sorry to see me leave the Ministry. The Exchange will drop three francs."

"You under-estimate," said the financier. "You are worth rather more than that."

At one of the official dinners to which he had been invited by Thiers, Rothschild and the Archbishop of

Paris arrived simultaneously at the door of the *salon*. Each politely waited to give precedence to the other. Finally Rothschild stepped forward. "All right, your Eminence. I'll go first. After all, the Old Testament precedes the New."

Philibert Audebrand, who regaled his companions with these anecdotes over their absinthe in the Café Riche, recalled a conversation he had once had with Heine, who, indicating Rothschild, said to Audebrand one day, "Look, there goes the greatest revolutionary of modern times."

When Audebrand ridiculed this, Heine went on to prove that in extending his financial ramifications down to the daily life of the people, Rothschild had done more to change the face of France than Napoleon himself. His loans, subscribed in small denominations, had revolutionized the nature of property; any one with a trifling sum could speculate in immense and imponderable enterprises, "and the cobbler round the corner with his ten francs in the bank has become a *rentier* as much as the Duc de Montmorency". This blessed consummation is approvingly recorded by Audebrand as the ideal of social security.

And so, mingling work and pleasure with the traditional economy of her race, France swings into her stride to the refrain of the café concert:

V'la l'travail qui r'prend,  
Espérance, confiance!  
V'la l'travail qui r'prend  
Paris sera toujours grand! . . .

## CHAPTER II

### VERSAILLES

BUT it was not on Paris that all eyes were centred during those first years following the Commune; it was on Versailles. Once again the old royal city held the place of honour, for the National Assembly was meeting there to decide the country's destiny. And thither had retired the man who, one might say, was the incarnate hope of France, so well had he merited his proud title of the Liberator. Thither also flocked the ambassadors, the *préfets* and all the administrators, greater and lesser, to confer with M. Thiers. Finally and most emphatically, there set out each day for Versailles a cohort of publicists, journalists and politicians, returning every night to Paris and reversing the old custom by working in Versailles all the week and resting in Paris on Sundays.

For many months the city of Louis XIV had beheld a very motley throng in her splendid avenues. She had united the functions of a spa and a fortress, sheltering those Parisians rejected for military service or stranded by the siege in her quiet solitary houses. Later, those avenues had felt the measured tread of troops returning to enforce order in Paris, the staff officers succeeded the troops and the generals succeeded the staff officers. Now the National Assembly and the President of the Republic were imposed upon them all: a regular Court of Justice had been installed and the executions had begun.

Every street was guarded and every cross-roads had its sentry. At nightfall the voices of the sentinels pierced the historic calm with sharp disquiet.

Convoys of Communards, taken red-handed with their arms, filed along the streets. A sad cortège, these ragged remnants of a delusion, advancing through a crowd that insulted them, belabouring them with sticks and umbrellas and spitting in their faces. They were headed for the Orangery, where they were herded together, with gendarmes guarding the gates and soldiers encamped

in the gardens below. Leaning on the marble balustrades, idle spectators gazed down on them, as decorative and remote as the background of a Veronese. Near by, queued up along the outer wall, were the wives and relations of the prisoners, bearing certificates, identity cards, letters of recommendation, etc., and waiting with beating hearts for the father, husband, or brother they hoped to be allowed to see. When the prisoners arrived there were tears and embraces, hysterical supplications, and outbursts of rage from some of the women. From time to time a strange noise, a sort of sharp crackling, tore the air. The execution of the condemned was taking place up there on the Plateau de Savory.

The disturbances quelled and order restored again, attention was concentrated on the National Assembly. Many of those deputies who, precipitately following Thiers, had hoped to find a lodging in the old town, tramped fruitlessly from place to place, and then were finally stranded. A number of them were reduced to camping for several days in the galleries of the Château, hastily improvised into parliamentary dormitories. All the hotels were besieged by applicants, and the streets were thronged with people gazing at the German proclamations which were still affixed to the walls.

Extravagantly attired women with swelling skirts, "pancake" hats, and minute parasols, accosted soldiers of every rank. Parisian refugees strolled about as if on holiday, mounted troopers rode backwards and forwards from the capital, and bands of tuft-hunters elbowed their way through the crowd trying to sort out the notabilities from the nonentities.

Soon they began to settle down. The Ministers found lodgings in the enormous *salons* of the Palace and the Château, the Ambassadors took up their quarters in the hotels around the Reservoir and the St. Louis quarters, while the horde of hangers-on, political and journalistic, went backwards and forwards from Paris each day.

The departure of the train for Versailles was an event.

The train left at 12.30 every day, and in the minute waiting hall (dignified by the title of vestibule) of the



Gare St. Lazare, which to-day seems so preposterous to us with its little plaster columns, narrow doors, and opaque glass windows, were gathered all those ardent new politicians thrown up by the fall of the Empire, all the publicists in search of "copy", all the eager officials who wanted to do a little wire-pulling, all the habitual hangers-on, and a good many of the wives of the representatives of the people, all making their way through the press towards the uncomfortable carriages of the Western State Railway.

"Getting into a carriage" (writes an eyewitness), "was not to be accomplished lightly. You had to satisfy the other occupants of your political affiliation. There were nods, signs, and passwords. When any important personages approached, groups formed round them immediately, and as they drew near the compartments those within cried out, 'We are the Centre'; 'We are Royalists'; 'We are Bonapartists', etc."

A large crowd of spectators assembled on the platform to identify celebrities. There came Édouard Tarbet, of *Le Gaulois*, carefully shaven, coiffured and pomaded, dressed in the latest style. Despite everything, he had remained Bonapartist. Immediately following him, long and lean as a fast-day, bowed slightly and carrying gingerly a wide-brimmed hat, was Philibert Audebrand, who had sat in the journalists' gallery for more than thirty years, watching one régime succeed another without raising an eyebrow—the complete professional journalist.

A harsh voice might be heard upbraiding some railway official who had seemed lacking in deference towards the "gentlemen of the Press". That would be Leo Lespès, who, under the pseudonym of "Timothée Trim", had been making a fortune for the *Petit Journal* during the last seven years. Wearing a startling velvet waistcoat, a flowing red tie and a lurid shirt, he was a well-known Parisian figure. His impressive watch-chain, weighted down with trinkets, made him look rather like a pawnbroker.

Another voice to be heard, equally harsh and even more furious, was that of M. Buffet, President of the Assembly. His unprepossessing face was creased perpetually, "like a man brushing his teeth", said Edmond de Goncourt. A coarse, unbridled nature with a bitter tongue, too sardonic to convince his listeners, but all the same a formidable adversary, he got at least a respectful hearing.

Two ardent Royalists were Numa Baragnon, straight from Nîmes, whose burning Southern eloquence aped Gambetta's, and the Marquis de Castellane, one of the rising hopes of the Assembly, an elegant and attractive young man with disarming manners. He was the favourite orator of the audience galleries, which were always crowded when he was announced to speak.

There also would be Clement Laurier—that celebrated Clement Laurier whom Gambetta called "a heart of gold", doubtless because he had an open purse of it. A tall man, with a shaven head and a thin, sarcastic mouth, he played the part of Maecenas to the Café de Madrid, a sneering Maecenas with considerable surprises in reserve for those who banked on the purity of his Republican sentiments.

Two men in black, grave, dry, and precise, were joined by a third, also in black but rather more elegant. This latter was Target, of some importance because of the dozen satellites who gravitated round him and whose votes he controlled. "The National Assembly," it was said, "is a pair of scales which balance almost evenly. Target's group is the weight which turns the scale."

As the train was about to start, a group of four or five persons hurried through the barriers.

"Gambetta!"

It was he, accompanied by his faithful Édouard Adam, his coat tails flying, his tie dishevelled, and his tall hat the reverse of immaculate. But his unwieldy form radiated authority. As he was hustled into his compartment, the whistle blew and the train for Versailles set off.

An hour later they arrived at the depressing little station of Versailles. They descended, sorted themselves out, and raided the one or two decrepit cabs and

prehistoric omnibuses which were all that lay at their disposal. Most of them had to walk, and they overflowed along the road to the Chateau.

The National Assembly was actually held in the old theatre of the palace. Movable benches were placed below the orchestra chairs, prolonging the seating on to the stage. Windows had been let into Duraneau's famous ceiling with Apollo crowning the victors, and at night the girandoles and an immense chandelier lit up the place with their innumerable candles. On the left and right of the gallery were two enormous lamps.

The boxes below the gallery were reserved for ambassadors and other distinguished personages and high officials. Princess Troubetskoi had a seat there, never missing one of Thiers's discourses, and Madame Édouard Adam was no less assiduous.

The rallying-point of the whole assembly, royalists, revolutionaries, moderates, and time-servers alike, was Thiers. "I am only an old umbrella on which it has rained for fifty years" was a saying of his; but in fact he juggled the conflicting parties with an ingenuity which provoked the enthusiasm of amateurs of politics. He was unrivalled in the delicate sowing of discord, in provoking quarrels, and in entrapping the unwary into false positions. His only terror was Gambetta. When the latter made one of his characteristic outbursts, Thiers would immediately seek the ear of the moderate parties, communicating his fears and his suspicions, and gently feeding them with a little of the implacable hatred he cherished for the tempestuous demagogue.

"If you haven't seen Thiers this last year, you have never seen anything" (wrote Maximin Rude). "He wriggles like an eel from one group to another, insinuating himself into the most impenetrable circles, finding some way of getting word of the most confidential negotiations, and playing his cards so adroitly that his adversaries are lost before the end of the first hand."

His indefatigable energy required hardly any rest.

"He gets up every morning at four o'clock" (wrote Paul Bosq)<sup>1</sup> "and goes down to the stables, escorted at the regulation distance by an enormous aide-de-camp. In winter he throws a plaid over his shoulders, and for these early morning visits to his horses he occasionally discards the formal top hat. Clad just like that he will receive on his way back any urgent deputation, or, behind tightly closed doors, one of those sinister-looking personages employed by him on his many curious errands. His friends have sometimes reproached him for employing such very dubious agents, but he always has a reply ready. 'It takes a scoundrel to get the better of an honest politician,' he once said good-humouredly. As it is well known that M. Thiers is in a better humour at this time of the day than at any other, the smooth-tongued make use of this knowledge to obtain from him concessions which he would refuse at any other moment."

At five o'clock he received the Ministers, and discussed events and information of all kinds. This went on until the formal council at eleven. About one o'clock he sat down to table with a few chosen guests, and later on, before repairing to the Assembly, he received still more deputations.

Between these sessions he would gather any audience he could find in the *salons* around him and philosophize indefinitely upon the nature of mankind. He would say smilingly how much he approved of the new form of government, how much simpler and less cumbrous it was now that he had only one person to convince—the National Assembly, instead of two as formerly—the King and the House of Peers.

"And I do not overlook," he said, "that eloquence need be cultivated less studiously than before."

Here he did himself an injustice; for never throughout his long career was he so remarkable an orator as at this period. The "silence for Monsieur Thiers" was proverbial in the Assembly and in the Galleries, a unique and

<sup>1</sup> *Souvenirs de l'Assemblée nationale.* (Plon, 1908.)

utter silence which imposed itself on all from the moment that the little man mounted the tribune, followed by his faithful Barthélémy Saint-Hilaire, who stood modestly a few steps away, ready to hand any necessary papers.

The historian of Napoleon was at his best in a financial discussion. No one could juggle with figures like Thiers, and he could always produce some damning fact from the prodigious reserves of his memory to clinch an argument.

When he particularly wanted to convince his audience he employed a peculiar technique which he once expounded to Jollivet and some others at one of his receptions. "At the crucial moment," he said, "I look around the deputies and fix on the one I consider the stupidest. I concentrate on him, I talk at him, and I never take my eyes off him all the time I am speaking."

When he received in private, M. Thiers was even more diplomatic. If he had to see an Orléanist he would talk of nothing but the past, recalling his services to the July monarchy, dwelling with emotion upon the simple and affectionate character of Louis Philippe and his family. Were his visitor a Royalist his voice would take on an almost religious quality as he enunciated, with emphatic and appropriate gestures, those sacred words "majesty" and "authority" and "the representative of God on earth". He did not frown even on Bonapartists, but adopted with them the light and airy tone of one who could not bear to dwell upon the cruelties of the present.

Finally, with the Republicans he was simple and straightforward, quoting Béranger and Victor Hugo, and even the hated Gambetta, with a wealth of professions of loyalty and service.

Nothing could have been more diametrically opposed to such a figure than that of Gambetta.

Gross of body, untidily clad, his huge head always hanging back a little, seeming to drag his limbs rather than to walk, he was a singular apparition seated in his place between the pallid Dréo, nephew of Garnier-Pages, and the vulpine Clement Laurier. But when he was about to speak, a single word from him shot like a bullet at his adversary.

"How he roars!" said a listener one day to Madame Edouard Adam.

"Why not? He is an authentic lion."

And the lion would then literally leap on to the platform.

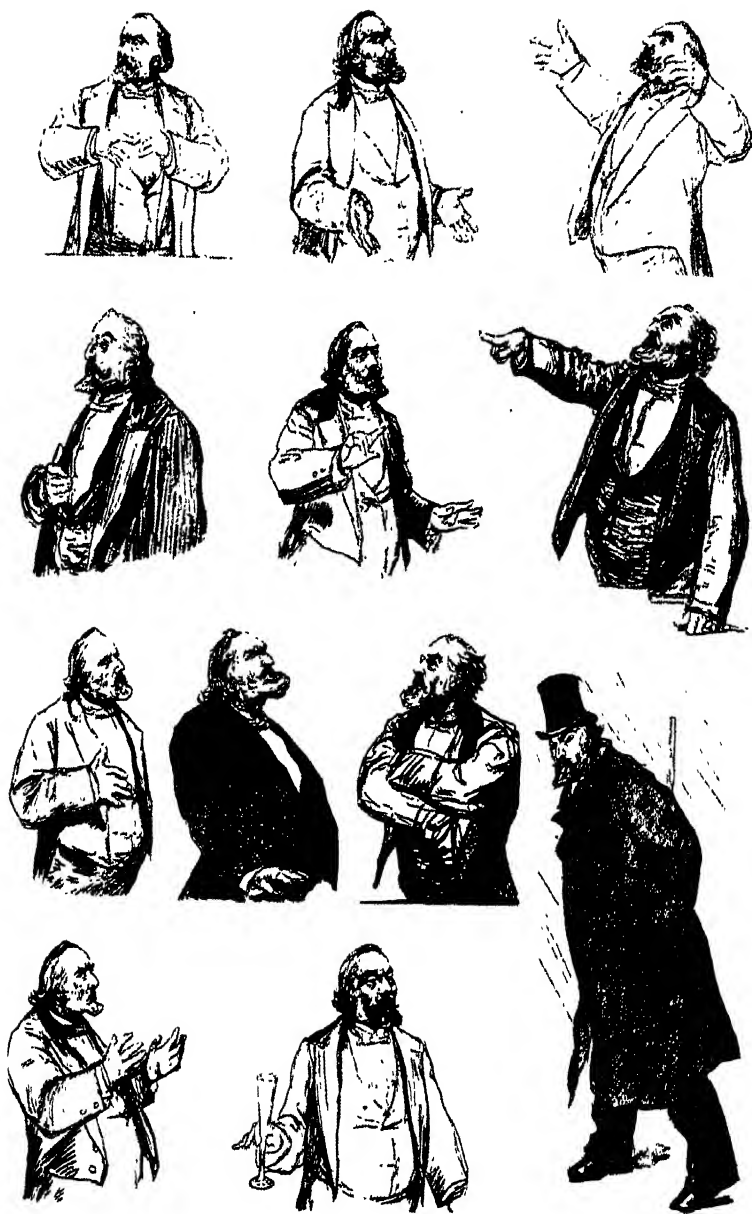
Essentially an orator and not a parliamentary debater, he would advance upon his adversary, head lowered, like a gladiator.

Fired by the inspiration of the moment, vesting his impromptu thoughts in resounding phrases, his words rushing along at a martial gallop which almost physically bore down his hearers, tangling, wrapping, and imprisoning them in the resistless flow. His massive, bull-necked head and deep vibrating voice were made to pour out sonorous periods to an almost reeling audience. His body was always in action, reinforcing his voice; he stamped up and down the platform, drew back and bounded forward, shook his burning head and relegated his opponents to outer nothingness behind with a scornful gesture of his hands. The sonorous southern voice beat down resistance like an unending clash of cymbals; no one could stand up against this force. He would begin by being attacked from all sides of the Assembly and would end by dominating them all.

Like Mirabeau, whom he in many ways resembled, he had the gift of annihilating an opponent with a blistering phrase. Henri Brisson was "a sham shirt-front with nothing underneath"; Floquet "a turkey in peacock's feathers"; the Duc de Broglie "a Macchiavelli of the back stairs"; Lockroy "a cigarette that is finished in two puffs".

After Thiers and Gambetta the rest of the Assembly were small beer. Perhaps the best of them was Rouher, who seemed to carry on his vast shoulders all the weight of the defunct régime. A thick, bowed little man, his fat, flabby cheeks flowing over on his whiskers, he gave an impression of commonplace heaviness. But business discussions would reveal in him a lucid mind and memory and a fund of good sense.

M. Audiffret Pasquier, a little, nervous, bilious-looking man, nevertheless assumed an extraordinary potency on



GAMBETTA AT THE TRIBUNE

Characteristic attitudes of the famous orator, from a contemporary cartoon





the platform. He was the head of the Orléanist party and hated the Legitimists as much as the Bonapartists, declaring that he would rather ally himself with the Republicans than go back to the errors of the pre-revolutionary régime.

Very different was M. Sosthène de la Rochefoucauld, Duc de Doudeauville et de Bisaccia, elegant aristocrat to his finger-tips, who would never condescend to violent oratorical display, but who preserved under all his charm and his suavity an irreducible contempt for Thiers. In vain the latter, faithful to his tactics, plied him with honours and flattery; they were all met with polite refusals or ironic smiles. Thiers offered the duke the embassy of St. James's, but the princely gift was refused. "No, I must stay here to turn you round again," said the duke smiling, "in case you accidentally go a little too far to the Left."

. . . . .

Outside the National Assembly there would have been little to do at Versailles, had not several political hostesses conceived the idea of installing themselves there in the spring. Chief among these was the Princess Troubetskoi, an old friend of M. Thiers, whose reunions were admittedly the centre of social life. The Princess Lise, as she was generally called among her intimates, had played an important part in society under the Empire. Animated, gracious, and pre-eminently intelligent, she had charm if not beauty, with her strange face framed in blond ringlets and lit by two beautiful malicious eyes. She had a diabolical wit and sparkle, but for all that hers was an upright and loyal nature, faithful to her friends.

She was a grand-niece of the Princess Lieven, and it seemed as though she was to revive that historic *salon*. With the war she had gone back to Russia, but she returned afterwards, first to Paris and then to Versailles, where she settled down in the rue de Courcelles.

There all the celebrities of the moment passed through the great white and gold drawing-room or gathered in the little silk-hung boudoir. The centre of attraction,

inevitably, was M. Thiers, flanked by Madame Thiers and Mademoiselle Dosne.

"As soon as he arrived he would take his place under the large palm in the middle of the drawing-room and would hold court there all the evening, carefully keeping interlocutors at a tactful distance, surrounded as he was, stimulating discussions, directing conversation, and generally playing on his audience as it suited him."<sup>1</sup>

The Princess always wore white and quantities of amazing jewels. The dinners she gave to her intimates were celebrated throughout Europe, for she knew that men are held as much by their stomachs as by their wits. And she served Thiers faithfully and absolutely to the end.

At the beginning of the Third Republic, all the political parties gave official receptions: there was the Republican *salon*, where Thiers was enthroned with his inseparable Barthélémy Saint-Hilaire; the Royalist *salon* conducted by the Duc de la Rochefoucauld; the Orléanist *salon* under the Duc de Broglie, and the Bonapartist *salon* where Madame de Pourtalès did the honours.

Little by little these rivals were eclipsed and the battle-field remained in the sole possession of M. Thiers, or, rather, of the whole Thiers family. From that time the tone of society changed.

The magnificent apartments which had witnessed so many sumptuous fêtes under the Empire were now tenanted by persons whose social ideas were governed by the conventions obtaining in a fifth-floor suburban flat. The homeliness of Madame Thiers, a little, dumpy woman invariably dressed in black, trotting about from one room to another, was proverbial.

Madame Thiers was a natural enemy of luxury and extravagance, desiring nothing but the barest necessities either for herself or her family. She imported the habits of the lower middle classes into the official world, and the heliotrope dressing-gown, in which she could be seen any morning in the corridors of the Palace, soon became one of the standing jokes of Paris.

<sup>1</sup> Claud Vento: *Les Salons de Paris en 1889*.

Every day at eight o'clock punctually she would come down the great staircase and make for the kitchen to give her orders to the servants. Then she would go up to her room again, dress hurriedly, and go out to do her own marketing, followed by a white-aproned servant carrying the basket. If there was to be a reception in the evening she would go personally to the florist in the rue du Plessis and choose the roses or the lilac for the table. In every purchase she displayed the greatest parsimony, disputing acidly with the shopkeepers to get a halfpenny taken off.

Harsh and severe to those who were directly under her orders, she was detested in private as much as she was ridiculed by smart Parisian society. Countless anecdotes of her cheeseparing and lack of social poise were circulated. One of them tells how when Princess Troubetskoi was lunching with Thiers, the latter selected a peach from the dish on the table and gallantly presented it. The peach, however, was bad, whereupon M. Thiers selected another. That also proved to be uneatable.

M. Thiers, greatly embarrassed, suddenly caught sight of some really magnificent peaches on a sideboard, and ordered the footman to present them to the princess.

But he had reckoned without Madame Thiers, who severely countermanded the order, saying, "Those peaches must not be touched. You know perfectly well that I am keeping them for dinner."<sup>1</sup>

As for Mademoiselle Dosne, that angular old maid whose nature was as sharp as her elbows, she arrogated to herself the role of major-domo, and she did, in fact, superintend the furnishing and decoration of the house, receiving orders, cutting prices, and allotting tenders.

The two women often went about together: at the official receptions they appeared side by side, "recalling the legendary silhouettes (albeit petticoated) of the good knight Don Quixote and his naïve henchman, the rotund Sancho Panza, except," added the irreverent commentator, "that Mademoiselle Dosne was not good and Madame Thiers certainly was not naïve".

<sup>1</sup> Pierre de Lano: *Après L'Empire*. (Paris 1894.)

Close at the heels of these three people, *bourgeois* to their finger-tips, came a fourth, equally grubby and uncouth. This was the *alter ego* of M. Thiers, Barthélemy Saint-Hilaire.

Saint-Hilaire was insignificance personified. He was like a useful machine which the President always kept handy, a combined buffer and waste-paper basket. He was solemn, formal, entirely self-effacing, and utterly devoted to Thiers. His wants were very few: he had a little room with a shabby arm-chair upholstered in striped velvet, a table without a cloth, and two rush-seated chairs beside. The walls were lined with bookshelves and there was a trunk in one corner. "They can send me away when they like," he used to say; "my trunk is packed ready."

The Spartan secretary had one distraction: he was engaged on an interminable translation of Homer into French verse.

The Thiers receptions were always preceded by a dinner.

"The President of the Republic" (says Paul Bosq) "sits down to table with his guests, but he leaves them almost immediately to hurry away to his own private repast, the menu of which is almost invariably soup, roast veal, and a sweet, washed down with a couple of glasses of claret. M. Thiers has generally finished his frugal dinner while his guests are still in the first course. As he finds it difficult to keep still in one place, he gets up and skips around the table, darting from one guest to another to ask if a dish is good, to talk politics with the deputies, art with the painters, and strategy to the generals, laying down the law to all impartially. If a telegram is brought to him, he opens it and excuses himself, saying, 'The business of France before everything.' When the dinner is over, he settles himself into a deep arm-chair and goes to sleep. Madame Thiers, with her finger on her lips, then ushers the guests on tip-toe to an adjoining room where they may talk, but only in low tones.

"As soon as he is awake, the President is in the midst of everything. He is a lively and sparkling talker; anecdotes and epigrams flow rapidly, while his suave

and delicate flattery charms away suspicion and hostility from any adversary whom he sets out to win round."

So it was not after all so very different from the great days of the Empire. Under the same ceilings, the same ladies trailed their ample skirts and displayed their dazzling shoulders and luxuriant ringlets among whiskered gentlemen in impeccable black or magnificent uniform. The Court of M. Thiers did not even lack its quota of distinguished strangers. The two most conspicuous of these were Lord Lyons, the English Ambassador, and Prince Orloff, the Russian. With the former Thiers was all sugar and honey. There were no stores of compliment and flattery which he did not exhaust on the person of the noble lord. He would button-hole him, draw him aside, and drench him in floods of eloquence. Knowing that the English had a constitutional prejudice against the Republican form of government, he devoted himself tirelessly to whittling it away. He trusted to his good humour, his cleverness, and his disarming appearance, but he trusted in vain. The adversary remained glacial and unimpressed.

His attitude towards Prince Orloff was a little more careless. He was considerably less in awe of the Russian than of the Englishman. Rightly or wrongly, he imagined that the prince was secretly favourable to French interests, and that having acquired some property near Fontainebleau he was to all intents and purposes a French citizen. M. Thiers deceived himself.

But this solecism was nothing compared with his handling of Count von Arnim, the German Ambassador. When the latter arrived in Paris after the ratification of peace, he might well have been astounded at his reception. This envoy of the hated conqueror was received by the vanquished as if he had been their dearest ally. The official world, society, the politicians, and the financiers fell over each other to overwhelm him with hospitality. The Count could hardly believe his senses.

He was a splendid-looking fellow, this tall Pomeranian, with a wide, smooth brow, hair worn "artistically" long,

deep eyes, a straight nose, and a slightly protruding underlip. He gave an impression of immense vitality, and he had a very charming daughter. All the women fell on him and all the young girls wanted to go around with the delightful *Fräulein von Arnim*.

Thiers, of course, went one better than any one else. He almost made Count von Arnim his most intimate friend. Daily he sent for him, asked his advice and reposed confidences in him. There was never a semi-official lunch or dinner without the Count von Arnim.

"Such a charming man," said M. Thiers.

"Such a delightful fellow," said the Ambassador.

If any one reproached the President with his excessive cordiality towards a German he would reply that the Count was a well-disposed German who would round off the sharp corners of Bismarckian aggression. And when it is added that the Count's admirers included Madame Thiers and Mademoiselle Dosne, there is no more to be said.

Such were the official receptions. M. Thiers delighted to see and be seen. For forty years he had hovered on the outskirts of Parisian society, and now that he found himself in the heart of it, he was prepared to love the whole world. A successful reception filled him with pride and pleasure, yet aroused at the same time his suspicions, his rancours, and his secret hopes. The little man coquetting with the world, accepting and rejecting it at one and the same time, for all his gifts lacked that indefinable quality which impresses itself upon others and commands their respect.

One of his greatest problems had been the attempt to preserve a modicum of good taste and elegance in his official receptions. This could not be secured without some heartburning, for certain of the more blatant politicians found themselves systematically excluded. All the same some curious lapses of manners, even among the select circle, were recorded. It was said that Monsieur Grévy<sup>1</sup> himself tapped the shoulder of a duchess, with the contemporary equivalent of "Hello, sister!"

But perhaps Monsieur Grévy has been libelled.

<sup>1</sup> Afterwards President.

CHAPTER III  
THE SOCIAL WORLD

SHORT as was the reign of M. Thiers it sufficed to bring into society a certain *bourgeois* tone which had been wholly lacking under the Empire. Although the elegant personages of the two *faubourgs* continued to frequent the official receptions and to sit down at the Liberator's table it was more out of habit than of positive willingness. In the confusion of those first few months following the Commune nobody had dared to do anything which might break the continuity of custom, and so they had gone to Versailles and to the Élysée as formerly they had gone to the Tuileries.

But the domestic routine of M. Thiers was not, as we have seen, likely to enthrall the brilliant men and the elegant women who claimed to set the tone of Paris society. Every day the *élite* became more and more conscious of the fact that although Thiers might be the Liberator he certainly was not "one of us".

The advent of Maréchal MacMahon was consequently reassuring. People knew now with whom they were dealing; for the MacMahons had long been familiar figures in the best *salons*, and the veteran soldier and his devout wife were received with both relief and respect.

But succeeding M. Thiers, and more particularly Madame Thiers, was not altogether unruffled, for the lady had a habit of almost literally creating desolation wherever she passed. When she left the Élysée all the kitchen utensils went with her, "right down to the door-knobs," malicious gossip added. The installation of the MacMahons, therefore, took some little time, but once it was accomplished a change was marked.

Madame de MacMahon did not, perhaps, exercise as much direct influence over her husband as she was credited with, but she never attempted to conceal her contempt and hostility towards those who did not belong to her own world. If an unpalatable minister or deputy was

presented to her she would flatly turn her back on him, and it took all the good offices of Edmond d'Harcourt, the Marshal's suave and diplomatic secretary, to placate disgruntled politicians, smooth over disagreeable incidents and prevent an open scandal.

The Marshal was visibly upset by these calculated affronts to men who were bringing him their goodwill and their good offices. But, unfortunately, he was one of the most timid as well as the most cautious of men, and in spite of his willingness he never quite succeeded in restoring the havoc of his wife's rudeness. He hesitated, faltered over a phrase, and ended by talking incredible nonsense to cover his nervousness; and since his memory was very poor he was almost always at a complete disadvantage in encounters of this kind.

In his heart he was just as much exasperated by the Royalists as by the Republicans. Both parties made the discovery that he would never really go far enough either way to suit them, and no one of any slight political importance would hesitate to accost the Marshal at one of his own receptions, take him into a corner, and hector him.

But, above all, MacMahon hated Thiers. Whether he had engineered it or not, the force of circumstance had made the latter the representative figure of the Third Republic as opposed to the thinly disguised royalism that reigned at the Élysée. No one was better aware than Thiers himself "that he had taken the bleeding and mutilated Republic in his arms and nursed it back to health and strength by his solicitude". "And," he added, "I am nearly seventy-five, but I have still plenty of energy."

That energy had not abandoned him. He organized and supported unweariedly the opposition to MacMahon, and his house in the rue St. George was known throughout Paris as its rallying-point. Not content with criticizing MacMahon in public and in private, he took a malicious pleasure in circulating anecdotes of crass stupidity and prudery which public opinion would invariably attribute to the President.

And all that the latter could do in return was to authorize daily a host of applications from all parts of



France to be allowed to call one of their streets after the Liberator, which daily routine never failed to rouse the President to a pitch of futile rage.

After they had been some little time in office the MacMahons decided to give only two or three large official receptions yearly at the Élysée, and to hold smaller and more intimate receptions weekly at Versailles. These "Thursdays" were to be severely limited to the elect.

"Admission to these 'Thursdays' is by special invitation card following acceptance on the President's list" (says Pierre de Lano). "No one can get in who is not personally known to the Marshal and his wife, who receive their guests immediately they are announced. The host and hostess remain until nearly eleven o'clock by the entrance to the *salons*, after which they rejoin their friends, the Maréchale going to the ladies, the President wending his way through the groups with a pleasant word for every one."

There was no formal supper on these occasions, but an open buffet was installed. The first part of the reception was devoted to a concert by the finest artistes from the Opéra, followed by general conversation and, finally, dancing.

Whatever Paris retained of authentic aristocracy passed through the Marshal's rooms and mingled with the Parliamentary and official guests. The Duc de Broglie elbowed the Orléans princes, the Prince de Joinville, and the Duc de Nemours. A very different group encircled old "Father Dufaure", as he was called. With his flowered waistcoat and his trousers hitched up too high by his braces, his neck encircled by a much-creased tie which worked round and round as he disputed vociferously in his nasal voice, M. Dufaure was scarcely an arbiter of elegance. But most of the people who surrounded him belonged either to the greatest families of France or to the thickest seams of bourgeois affluence. The purely Parliamentary guests naturally oscillated between the two.

Following the absurd custom of the times, the women

had gravitated together in one or two rooms, while the men, as usual, had isolated themselves in an improvised smoking-room.

Gathered around the Maréchale, who wore stiff white silk and feathers, were the Princess Troubetskoi, also in her invariable white, the Duchess of Chartres in rose-coloured silk with a white embroidered corsage, the Princess Metchnikoff in rose chiffon, the Princess Gedroys in lilac, and the Marquise de Morny in pearly grey.<sup>1</sup>

From the conservatory trailed out the languorous opening chords of a waltz. As soon as it was heard the couples drifted together, entwined and swayed out under the myriad lights of the great chandelier. Magnificent uniforms and sober black brushed satins and laces; some of the men wore knee-breeches and ruffles; many had monocles slung on broad ribbons barring their shirt-fronts. Whiskers were popular, and fluttering ringlets fell on many of the beautiful shoulders which surged up from the low-cut gowns. The long, floating trains left behind them a trail of perfume. . . .

The example of the MacMahons was faithfully followed throughout Paris. Elegant suppers and expensive entertainments again became the vogue, and the Princess Mathilde<sup>2</sup> reopened her *salon* in the rue de Berri. The position which this centre of learning and wit had held under the Empire is common knowledge, and its reopening was warmly welcomed. It was an essentially literary *milieu*, and the leading lights were Edmond de Goncourt, Alexandre Dumas, and Renan. It was as frankly liberal as of old, but liberalism was no longer dangerous, and the frequenters piously preserved the façade of the old régime while overflowing with enthusiasm for the ideals of the new.

A brilliant muster gathered on the first floor, the whole of which was thrown open for receptions, comprising three large *salons* opening into each other, a dining-room, and a vast conservatory built over a part of the garden. Here, amid a wealth of exotic plants, reposed the Canova bust of Napoleon I on a marble column.

<sup>1</sup> Georges Duval. *Memoires d'un Parisien* (Flammarion).

<sup>2</sup> The daughter of Jerome Bonaparte, niece of Napoleon I.

In the dining-room were priceless tapestries, and the drawing-rooms, hung with red damask, contained pictures by Gérôme, Meissonier, and Hebert, as well as water-colours by the Princess herself.

“By the fireplace in the first drawing-room the Princess used to await her guests. Then they passed on into the conservatory, the favourite spot of the mistress of the house as of all her friends. There she had made a sort of glorified studio, and there, surrounded by her circle, she loved to sit close to the Imperial bust, as though sheltered by the glories of the past and fortified by their remembrance. Round about her, other groups would form here and there, in the corners, under the enormous palms, or else by the screens which divided the immense area into eight or ten little boudoirs, with the light filtering through the overshadowing branches of the strange tropical trees.”<sup>1</sup>

Wednesday was the day reserved for artists and men of letters. There was a dinner party but no reception. These “Wednesdays” were restricted to a few very intimate friends, such as de Goncourt, Renan, Benedetti, and Madame Conneau. Of one Wednesday in December 1873 Edmond de Goncourt notes in his journal:

“The dinner had been frigid and constrained, long silences had fallen, and the thoughts of every one were on Bazaine and the judgement that was about to be passed.”<sup>2</sup>

“After dinner, the Princess took up her tapestry, which was her way of removing herself from those round about her and belonging to herself alone. She scarcely responded to those who politely came to sit in the little chair at her feet, but as each new-comer came into the room she would raise her head and jerk out, ‘Is there any news yet?’ At last, as the evening drew on and

<sup>1</sup> Claud Vento: *Les Salons de Paris*.

<sup>2</sup> Marshal Bazaine, defender of Metz during the war, was tried by court martial for negotiating with the Prussians without authority. He was sentenced to death, but was subsequently reprieved.

nobody brought any news, she burst out suddenly. 'Men are marvellous! None of you knows anything! Now if I wore trousers I'd be out and would know all the news by now. Will you, young Gautier, go and see if you can hear anything at the Cercle Impérial?'

"Gautier was a long time gone. As I was leaving I met him in the doorway and he shot it out at me: 'Unanimously condemned to death.'"<sup>1</sup>

Almost opposite this *salon* was another representing very different opinions, although still more or less anchored to tradition. It was to play the most important role during the first fifteen years of the new régime. This was the *salon* of Monsieur and Madame Édouard Adam.

A sincere democrat and a faithful friend, upright and scrupulous, Édouard Adam might have personified the heroic Republican ideal as opposed to that Empire which he had fought all his life, and to whose downfall he had assisted. A former colleague of Armand Carrel in the *National*, general secretary to the Seine Prefecture, and then Conseiller d'État in 1848, he was deprived of his posts by the Coup d'État. He became one of the most implacable enemies of Napoleon III, and since the fall of the latter he had been made Chief of Police, an uncongenial office which he held only for a very short time before exchanging it for a seat in the National Assembly.

Madame Adam was one of the most remarkable women of her time. She was learned rather than artistic; she had been nursed on antique studies and reared in admiration of the heroic days of ancient Greece and republican Rome. Fired with the great and generous ideals which had provoked the Revolution of 1848, she was the ideal companion for her husband in his stormy political career. Trembling with fury at the outrages on liberty perpetrated by the Empire, aspiring in ardent faith towards the triumph of democratic government, she had already gathered round her, during the last years of the Imperial régime, a band of enthusiasts for the same cause:

<sup>1</sup> *Journal des Goncourts.*

About 1868 she had made the acquaintance of Gambetta, then famous only as an advocate. The Adams became extraordinarily intimate with him, and the fall of the Empire naturally strengthened this connection, and made their house practically an annexe to the Ministry.

It was there that the three of them decided on the foundation of the *République française*, which became the mouthpiece of the Republican party. They found an office in the rue du Croissant so that they could go to dine at the Adam house in the Boulevard Poissonnière, for they had very little time to spare between the work at Versailles and the work on the paper.

The first issue made its appearance on the 7th of June, which, said Madame Adam, placed it under the protection of Apollo. The declared object of the journal was to "defend the Republic and to work to rehabilitate France".

From that moment the Adam *salon* began to increase in lustre and importance. All political, literary, and artistic Paris took the road to the Boulevard Poissonnière. The great stone staircase bore endless streams of new arrivals, and the huge circular hall of the suite, with its beautiful old furniture and its girdle of palms, was crammed full of silk hats and overcoats. The reception suite proper consisted of the Louis XVI dining-room, a very long *salon* with three French windows giving on to the balcony, and a smaller *salon* where Madame Adam held court.

"This was the Turkish *salon*, hung throughout with Oriental textiles. Low seats covered with old embroideries, Louis XVI *bergères*, arms, bronzes, earthenware, china, Venetian glass, lacquer furniture, inlaid chairs and Japanese fabrics draped into *portières*, formed an elegant confusion, in the centre of which, on the mantelpiece, was planted the bust of Madame Adam by Salomon. An enormous divan covered with cushions took up almost the whole of one wall, near the windows. All this at night was bathed in light from a beautiful Venetian chandelier of jewel-like colouring, a veritable rain of fire in fairyland."

How well this description conveys the authentic note

of Second Empire taste, with its exotic stuffs and *bibelots* straight out of the pages of Edmond de Goncourt.

The political influence of the Adam *salon* was certainly at its height under the MacMahon presidency. The death of Édouard Adam, however, gave it a new orientation, towards literature rather than politics, and the inauguration of the *Nouvelle Revue* gave it further impetus in that direction. But to the very end its animating spirit was that of the woman who had created it.

A large number of new writers, of whom Pierre Loti and Paul Bourget are perhaps the best-known, were launched on their careers through the Adam influence. In literature Madame Adam showed considerable eclecticism, but her political theories narrowed down to two or three fixed ideas among which that of a *revanche* against Germany grew more and more predominant until it became the pivot of her mind. Until old age physically prevented her from discharging the active duties of a hostess, she was always ready to give endless time and attention to any one who seemed to promise assistance in this task which she had set herself. She had abandoned long ago the more revolutionary notions derived from Gambetta, and of her association with the tribune nothing remained in the end but a fervent and rather touchy patriotism.

. . . . .

Beside these two outstanding *salons*, the others of the period pale into insignificance. But their very number bears witness to the rapidity with which Paris was recovering from the war and the Commune.

There was the blonde Comtesse de Pourtalès, the former protégée of Madame de Metternich, who had made a triumphal return to the city, and whose entertainments were celebrated for their costly splendour. On one occasion she was said to have spent more than 80,000 francs on flowers alone. She was an exquisite eighteenth-century type with a faint resemblance to Marie Antoinette, and the beauty of her gowns and the lustre of her pearls were equally incomparable.

Other hostesses were Madame Beulé, widow of the

former director of the Beaux-Arts, whose reputation as a trencherwoman had earned her the title of "*La belette des buffets*", and Madame de Blocqueville of the powdered hair, who was said to have served as the model for Pailleron's "*Monde ou l'on s'amuse*". Sunk in her arm-chair she had watched all the celebrities of Paris file past for three-quarters of a century. A writer herself (she had been congratulated by Lamartine on her first book), she loved above all things to be surrounded by writers and artists.

There was also the Vicomtesse de Tredern, once that Mademoiselle Say, daughter of the wealthy sugar-refiner, whose first marriage to the Duc de Brissac had caused so much scandal during the last years of the Empire. At first Paris society had set its face against the young woman, but she had shown herself much cleverer than her adversaries, and had stood up against the storm with admirable nonchalance.

One day, while giving tea to some of her husband's friends, she spilt a little on her dress. As she dried it with her handkerchief the Duc de Praslin said:

"Be careful, madame! Sugar stains."

"Not so much as blood," said the young woman calmly.

After the death of the Duc de Brissac she married the Vicomte de Tredern. Her house in the Place Vendôme was decorated in restrained style, and under its gilded ceilings, worthy of Versailles, was born the first of those musical evenings which were to become the rage of Paris. The hostess herself, a pupil of Cavalho, had a magnificent voice of warm and vibrating quality, and she was always gracious to any one who could sing or play, or even talk about music.

Many more names could be added to this brief list of those stars who glittered in the social sky at the beginning of the Third Republic. They continued the traditions of the Second Empire with as much grace, almost as much extravagance, and nearly as much wit. Truly it seemed as though nothing had changed in France.

But there were some destinies that had been drastically changed by the fall of the Imperial régime. For the general public the brilliancy of the new social world had

largely obscured the memory of the old, but those who, whatever their rank or position, had been definitely attached to the Court and were stamped indelibly with its seal, had either disappeared with it or were left to draw out a slow agony of regret.

Not only had certain ways of living ceased to exist, but a certain atmosphere had definitely and finally vanished.

It was, as usual, in the *milieux* of high society and the *demi-monde* that those phenomena which generally follow a change of political régime were once more observed.

Immediately after the war the discreet reappearance of some of those who had played a great role in the past attracted attention for a fugitive minute, but these apparitions faded away voluntarily and were seen no more.

Thus, on the 26th of August 1871 *L'Illustration* noted the presence in Paris of the Princess de Metternich herself:

"This week Madame de Metternich has arrived from Germany. It is rumoured that this former luminary will appear only to disappear. There are pilgrims who tour the whole round world solely that their eyes may see the ruins of the holy places. So with the ex-ambadress of Austria. . . .

"The first item on her programme was a visit to the Bois de Boulogne, seated behind the little trotting ponies she had made so fashionable. But as soon as the Arc de Triomphe was passed, the Princess gave the order to turn back. She could not bring herself to go any farther. That 'Go back' has the brief and terrible eloquence of an epitaph."

Another shadow glided down the boulevards, along the rue de la Paix and back to the little house in the rue de Cambon, where she who had been called the prettiest woman in Europe had once lived. It was she herself, the Comtesse de Castiglione,<sup>1</sup> who had been swept away by the cataclysm and had now drifted back, a poor piece of wreckage that had barely survived the storm.

She was still beautiful; those classic lines were not yet

<sup>1</sup> The mistress of Napoleon III.



obliterated; there was still that in her eyes which burnt up those on whom they lighted. But the mainspring of her will seemed broken. She believed in nothing any more—not in her power over men, not in her star, not even in her beauty. That spirit of intrigue that had once burnt so ardently sustained her no longer. The sun of her fortune had set.

She still had a hearing in certain circles, and she had tried to sound Thiers on the possibilities of a restoration of the Monarchy, dreaming of a new Court where a place would be assured to her. She got a polite reception and was shown out with every appearance of respect.

Very soon it seemed as though the gathering years had suddenly swooped down on her head; the oval face lost its wonderful contours, the features blurred and thickened. Then she decided to shut herself up, to hide away from all the spectacle of her loveliness in ruin. She banished all mirrors from her rooms, she kept the shutters always closed, and the furniture, in its sombre covers, could only be vaguely made out in a glimmer of gas. No bell sounded throughout the living tomb where the most famous of the Empire beauties immured herself until she died.

Without so deliberately cutting herself off from the living, the Comtesse de Mercy Argenteau, Napoleon III's last flame, went into voluntary exile, wandering across Europe until she finally settled down in Russia, in a modest lodging in St. Petersburg. There, perpetually dressed in mourning black, she lived in a room as plainly furnished as an anchorite's cell.

The celebrated courtesans of the past régime fared no better. Most of them passed into oblivion, or at best eked out some dull and pedestrian end.

Esther Guimond finished up in a quiet villa in the rue Chateaubriand, where, with her cook, old Blanche, as her companion, she was left to dream of her lost youth and her past lovers, of the power and the luxury which had been hers.

She still received those who cared to come and see her, in a red and gilt drawing-room of very middle-class style, like that of a minor civil servant's wife. She herself "a dumpy little old woman, round-backed and grey-haired,

with a handkerchief round her head and her hands perpetually in her apron pockets", would greet them in a rough masculine voice and go on chatting with the breezy familiarity of a barmaid.

Maurice Talmeyr, who saw her some years later, has left an extraordinary portrait of this debris of the Second Empire:

"A mocking, wrinkled old face, the lips like two gashes of a penknife, and a broken upturned nose which was a monument of undying insolence . . . about her whole person was an air of suppressed excitement and wariness which was quite unique. In talking, she veered from buffoonery to tragedy, her little, wrinkled, writhing hands like frogs' feet plunging feverishly in and out of her apron pockets. Her wicked wit and ferocious cynicism were poured out like vitriol on the world."

She still saw a good many people one way and another, and Maurice Talmeyr describes a dinner there with Arsène Houssaye and Émile de Girardin, who still had almost a veneration for her. The dining-room was no more sophisticated than the drawing-room; the atmosphere had the authentic note of respectable provincial boredom. Émile de Girardin pontificated, as usual, and Arsène Houssaye indulged in reminiscences, evoking those happy days gone by, so far, so long, almost a century ago it seemed.

La Guimond herself carved at table, with a formidable array of implements in front of her, like a surgeon's case. From this she would select the appropriate weapon and proceed to carve up the victim in great style. "The operation completed, she would carefully cut off a small piece and present it to Girardin, who would taste it judiciously, re-taste it, and finally declare the dish good, indifferent, or superlative."

At least La Guimond managed to preserve in her retreat the best culinary traditions of the Second Empire. Her one-time friend, Marguerite Bellanger, who had fled to England in 1870 and succeeded in getting herself respectably married to an English naval officer, had declined to

stop in the country of her adoption because the food was so bad there. So she returned to Paris to figure once more in that somewhat equivocal society which she knew so well, but finally she retired to a country house at Villeneuve in Touraine, where she lived out her days to the edification of the parish priest and her neighbours in general.

So, on the whole, the *demi-monde* might have done worse for itself. One of the best-known of its members, La Paiva, even succeeded in retaining a measure of influence, and kept open house to politicians in the hope of being able to play a part comparable with that of the great royal mistresses of the past. Some said she was working to bring about an understanding between France and Germany; others, more simply, that she was Bismarck's spy. In any case she had Gambetta in her toils and could be relied upon to do nothing to embarrass his career. The tribune dined there every night, and as often as not lunched there, and was constantly to be encountered going to or coming from her house in the Champs-Élysées, which he treated as his own.

Louis Andrieux<sup>1</sup> gives us a curious sidelight on one of these evenings:

"When I arrived, Gambetta was stretched out on a sofa, smoking, and talking to Henckel, with Spuller, Arsène Houssaye, and La Paiva at a discreet distance. When the footman announced that dinner was ready, La Paiva, magnificently dressed and still bearing some relics of her former beauty in her harness of jewellery, took Gambetta's arm and ascended with him the onyx and porphyry staircase which led up to the dining-room on the first floor.

"Nobody talked politics at dinner, to Spuller's secret relief, no doubt. This *fidus Achates* of Gambetta, who would have gone cheerfully to hell with him, was visibly uneasy at the great man's rather indiscreet choice of friends. Despite a dull and unpromising exterior, Spuller lacked neither perspicacity nor common sense. Gambetta called him his 'cold shower-bath'.

<sup>1</sup> Louis Andrieux: *A travers la République*. (Payot.)

"That night Gambetta was talking about art with the air of authority with which he talked about everything. He admired Baudry's decorations on the ceiling, which were, he maintained, superior to the same artist's work in the new Opera House.

"In the course of the next hundred years,' said Spuller, 'this house will be celebrated as a museum.'

"Well, it is celebrated as a club already."<sup>1</sup>

"Arsène Houssaye spoke of the changes in the district where he and his son Henry lived, regretting his rather premature sale of the ground where, when he was director of the Comédie Française, he used to take the company to pick grapes.

"Changing the subject, I complimented him on the success of the balls he organized and particularly upon his tactful wording of the announcement 'Beautiful ladies must wear masks.'

"Up to the time I left I never heard a word about Bismarck, Kulturkampf, or Tunis, still less of any political re-orientations of Gambetta's."

But there must have been other occasions when these thorny subjects were discussed or La Paiva would not have received that mysterious order to take herself over the frontier. She was not the woman to abandon lightly anything she took up, and she must have realized that she was deeply compromised to have acquiesced so readily. Everything comes to an end some day, as even courtesans of the Second Empire were to discover. Especially when the Second Empire had gone and there was only a Republic which started its career by announcing that it proposed to keep its courtesans in their proper place.

<sup>1</sup> It is now The Travellers' Club.

## CHAPTER IV

### PARIS UNDER THE MARSHAL

PARIS under the MacMahon presidency was not simply the brilliant city restored to all its former life and gaiety; it was also, and primarily, a city in the course of material reconstruction.

The ravages of the siege and the Commune had made gigantic lesions in the fabric. Thiers had attacked the problem of repair with laudable alacrity, and the Marshal pursued it with the same diligence. But it was not merely a question of razing the ruins and wreckage which disfigured the city: both Thiers and MacMahon aspired to complete the grandiose scheme for the modernization of Paris which the Second Empire had initiated.

Everybody knows what Paris was like before Haussmann came. Narrow and tortuous streets, thick with mire, and honeycombed with blind alleys and decrepit houses dating from the seventeenth century at least. No boulevards, no vistas, no wide and serviceable streets to accommodate the rapidly increasing traffic which piled up in indescribable confusion on both sides of the Seine.

Haussmann's plan, which has given us the Paris that we know to-day, made an immediate revolution in this labyrinth, and its advantages were recognized from the outset. But, unhappily, the war came and prevented him from carrying out his task, and its completion was left to be laboriously accomplished by his successors.

All shades of opinion were united in exhorting the Thiers and MacMahon Governments to spare neither time, labour, nor money to finish the modernization of the city. And it may be held to the credit of the new régime that it did so faithfully carry on the work.

Between 1873 and 1878 new roads, new theatres, and improvements of all kinds were being continuously inaugurated until the imposing edifice was crowned by the Great Exhibition, which was to be the most emphatic sign before the world of the recovery of France.

It would be tedious to catalogue the building activities of the period here, but a few of the more noteworthy may be mentioned. The ruins of the old Hôtel de Ville were swept away, and a new one was erected on the same site; the restoration of Nôtre-Dame (alas!) was put in hand, and the Vendôme Column restored and set up again.

On the left bank of the Seine the Boulevard St. Germain was extended, another Ministry of War erected. The Boulevard Henri Quatre was completed, and the churches of St. Francois-Xavier and St. Joseph. The synagogue in the rue Victoire and the fountains in the Place de Théâtre Français and the Avenue de l'Observatoire were built.

In the Palais de l'Industrie were exhibited the plans of the Sacre-Cœur, the foundation stone of which was laid by the Archbishop of Paris on the 17th of June 1875.

Finally it was decided to complete the Avenue de l'Opéra, and on the 19th of September 1877 Marshal MacMahon opened the new street in full state. It was true that the scaffolding still remained on either side, but the buildings were unmistakably rising rapidly, to a growing chorus of public admiration.

"In two years' time" (wrote a reporter in *Figaro*) "we shall have one of the finest avenues in the whole of Europe. The façade of the Opéra at the end, flanked by two rows of superb new buildings, will be a unique sight."

But all this was nothing compared to the excitement over the reopening of the Opéra itself two years previously, on the 5th of June 1875. For some months before that Parisians had gazed in admiration at the profusion of marble columns, the great rotundas, the bronzes, the trophies and all the ornaments which make it the key building of the period, the apogée of Second Empire taste.

The opening night was unique in Parisian annals. Early in the morning hundreds of people had gathered outside, all the afternoon the crowd was growing, and when evening came at least seven or eight thousand

curious spectators were massed in the square. The builders had worked up to the last minute, the curtain was actually only finished at seven o'clock, an hour before the official opening. All the seats had been distributed by the Government and the distinguished guests included the ex-King of Hanover, the ex-Queen Isabella of Spain and her son Alphonso XII, and 250 members of the National Assembly, with the leading lights of the Bench, the Army, the Academy, and all the State Departments.

The more important provincial mayors had also been invited, and a number of foreign burgomasters, among them the Lord Mayor of London, who arrived in his magnificent gilt coach with the celebrated coachman, footmen, and outriders, his sword-bearer and his sheriffs, all in the glory of their picturesque costumes.

Marshal MacMahon arrived at half-past eight punctually. Before taking his place, he made a tour of inspection, examining the corridors, which were, he thought, insufficiently lighted, and the grand staircase whose sumptuousness was a wonder to all. The red curtain with its gold fringe was adjudged superb. The women wore their gayest gowns and the number and variety of the uniforms present gave the whole an air of fête.

"The curtain rose on the opening bars of *La Juive* [to quote again from *Figaro*]. An effective scene, a little overweighted by the draperies over the ceiling. Villaret, Marie Krauss, and Basquin sang with power and vivacity, but were not then applauded. For one thing, the attention of the audience was on the house rather than on the stage, and for another it is customary on these gala nights to reserve applause until a lead is given by the head of the State. . . .

"Another wave of excitement passing through the audience marked the arrival of Queen Isabella of Spain and her son, Alphonso XII. All the lorgnettes were trained on the young king, and this battery of curiosity had almost the effect of a public pronouncement. There were sidelong glances at the other princes present . . . but each man kept his reflections to himself. . . .

"As the Act progressed, the orchestra seemed rather muffled, as though its sound was quenched by the humid air. It rallied, however, for the finale, which was vigorously executed by Madame Krauss and Villaret, and the royal procession on the stage was of such unparalleled splendour that enthusiasm bore down etiquette and loud applause burst out. . . ."

During the *entr'acte*, the audience gave free rein to their curiosity. They poured out into the corridors and the foyers, open-mouthed at the grandiose plan and the flamboyance of the decorations. "Numerous footmen," says an eyewitness, "were posted in the vestibules to direct visitors, and their assistance was, in fact, almost indispensable in such a labyrinth." The general verdict was of unqualified admiration, except that the grand foyer was thought to be a little too narrow for its height and the gilding a trifle too emphatic.

When the performance was over the audience went out down the great marble staircase between a double row of cuirassiers, whose presence was necessary to restrain the crowd outside from surging in and invading the building.

So throughout the city there echoed the sounds of rebuilding and reconstruction. But if the frame was being renovated the canvas was not. More or less the same people were doing much the same things which they had done under the Empire, save that entertaining perhaps was a little less lavish, a little less original. A sort of middle class prudence took control of the social life, the art, and the literature of this period of transition.

The loud voice of Émile Zola was an exception; so also was the hyper-realism of Edmond de Goncourt. But the hour of naturalism had not yet struck. People subscribed to the moral order, and they demanded the same intellectual diversions as had been provided for them under Napoleon III.

The favourite writer of the period was Ludovic Halévy, whose facile and frivolous romances were very popular. Ferdinand Fabre, that conscientious annalist of the French clergy, did not intrude a single subversive note.



Alphonse Daudet continued to enchant his readers, but they preferred him in his role of picturesque story-teller to that of the ironic observer of Parisian life and morals. To be fashionable then one had to be prudent, discreet, and almost dull.

In the theatre, there was a revival of the operetta, that old friend of the defunct régime who had been interred during those fatal years of war but was now resurrected and singing at the top of her voice. The popularity of the operetta rose to undreamt-of heights with Charles Lecocq's *Fille de Madame Angot*. As Offenbach is the typical musical figure of the Second Empire, so is Lecocq of the fifteen years following.

*La Fille de Madame Angot*, whose success was to be as striking as *La Belle Hélène*, found it very difficult to get a presentation at all. Cantini, the director of the Folies-Dramatiques, had declined it, whereupon Lecocq took it to Brussels. Only the proof of its success there had induced Cantini to give it a hearing in Paris at all, and then he only proposed to put it on for a fortnight "while we are rehearsing something else".

The audience fell on it from the start. Every song was encored repeatedly and next morning all Paris was humming:

"Ah! c'est donc toi, madame Barras."

Cantini was almost panic-stricken; he could not believe in the money which he saw flowing into the box-office. He was so dazed that he forgot to pay the artists, but on the hundredth performance his avarice relented so far as to give them a somewhat meagre supper in celebration. The caricaturist Cham drew a cartoon showing the ineffable director seated upon his bursting money-bags and saying, "I'll do you better on the five hundredth."

Lecocq was now surely launched on the tide of popularity, and his music was heard everywhere. *Giroflé-Girofla*, *La Marjolaine* and above all *Le Petit Duc* became popular almost overnight. Their names were to echo a long time in the memory of Parisians, names recalling so many happy evenings spent listening to this music, at once

gay and discreet, with none of the incoherence of Hervé or the frenzy of Offenbach; the music of after 1870 had grown saner across the tragic years.

To the name of Lecocq must be added that of Robert Planquette, whose *Gloches de Corneville* was another outstanding success of the period. Its innocent gaiety was exactly suited to a taste which barred audacities, and whose established authors continued to serve up exactly what was required of them.

It is to painting, if anywhere, we must look for the first signs of innovation. Puvis de Chavannes had just shown his *Eve* and *Ste Genéviève*, magnificent decorations which had aroused both great enthusiasm and bitter criticism. But Cabanel, Bonnat, Meissonier, Dubufe, and Carolus Duran continued to turn out their accomplished portraits without any disquieting traits.

The newspapers of the period were full of their doings. They were dined and fêted, flattered and consulted, their little mannerisms and tantrums recorded with interest and respect. Their models were brought out to bask in this limelight; people wanted to see those faces which had been "immortalized", and gossip about them circulated throughout Paris.

As, for instance, that Bouguereau's model was engaged at a fixed rate of 300 francs a month, with board and lodging in the artist's house. She passed her time in the kitchen, or else knitting stockings. Whenever the Master wanted his model he would call out, "Madame, just take this pose for me", and when he had finished she would go back to her stockings.

Madame Bertha, Stevens's model, was one of the prettiest women in Paris. The full-breasted Adeline (nicknamed "Madame la Tétonnière") generally posed for Bonnat, while Aïcha, a tall girl of appalling scragginess, had the honour to be the original of Henri Regnier's "Salome".

Clélie, who was also as thin as a fishing-rod, generally posed for Meissonier.

This little world had a place of its own in the life of Paris. The painters were not content merely to be talked

about; they succeeding in imposing their ideas on the public, and more particularly their taste in residential neighbourhoods and interior decoration. This was the period when the little studio house in the Parc Monceau was all the rage. The house must be Renaissance or Medieval; it must be furnished "artistically". Essential properties were carved wooden staircases, sombre tapestries, a few pieces of immense and gloomy furniture, and finally and inevitably a conservatory or winter garden, that monument of the day before yesterday.

The street scene went on. . . .

There was the reception of the Shah of Persia in 1873. That was a great event, for he was the first foreign sovereign to visit Paris since the war. His arrival had been talked about for months previously; enormous preparations were made and crowds gathered in the streets to welcome him. When he appeared in his Persian turban, with his straight tunic and his breast glittering with diamonds and decorations, an enormous mob roared out "*Vive le Schah!*"

Another great spectacle was the funeral of Thiers. All Paris turned out for the occasion. The route of the procession was black with people. The coffin was invisible under a mountain of flowers, "All heads were bared and in the streets nothing could be heard but the tramp of the soldiers and the solemn chords of the music."

When the crowd saw the huge black banner with crape streamers bearing the words "From Belfort to M. Thiers", a shiver ran through them, the deep sigh of a people remembering the sorrows it has passed through. The spectator previously quoted, an Englishman, added: "Since the coronation of Queen Victoria I have never seen a public spectacle so impressive as the funeral of M. Thiers, and nothing has given me a greater respect for the character of the French."

The Exhibition of 1878 was the final flower to be added to the bouquet of the history of the period. It is probably true to say that nothing has ever given so much pleasure to our compatriots; not even the Exhibition of 1889, which was more spectacular and materially more successful.

But the Exhibition of 1878 was more than an exhibition: it was the visible sign of national recovery, a proof laid down before the world to show that France had regained her wealth, power, and political stability. In a transmogrified and embellished Paris, her bounds enlarged, her roads cleared and extended, her transport facilities improved (the first tramways had just made their appearance), it was decided to stage an exhibition which would make the memory of 1867 pale into insignificance.

Marshal MacMahon was more eager than almost anyone, for he was so proud to think that so stupendous an undertaking should be associated with his term of office. He was in fact rather a nuisance about it, perpetually interrogating the promoters and worrying whether it would be ready by the 1st of May.

Of course it was not ready by the 1st of May. But enough had been done to make the opening justifiable, and everybody knew that the public would accept the unfinished state as a respectable and time-honoured custom. In any case, the Marshal was satisfied and he proceeded radiantly to the opening ceremony.

Despite the inclemency of the weather it was a brilliant sight, and if the Marshal's entourage did not rival the Emperor's in 1867 it was nevertheless impressive enough.

Among the royalties present were the Prince of Wales, the Crown Prince of Denmark, the Duke of Aosta, and Prince Henry of the Netherlands.

When the Marshal took his place on the platform, his soldierly bearing and air of authority made a considerable impression upon the foreign guests.

"When the Marshal came back" (writes M. de Freycinet) "to invite us to visit the Palace with him, we marvelled at the joy and pride so plainly glowing in his face. We could hardly recognize in this genial, smiling man, who had just been heard to pronounce the fatal word 'republic' without a trace of embarrassment, the rather dour and morose President whose official duties always seemed to weigh so heavily on him."

To visit the Exhibition became the fashion throughout France, and visitors from the provinces arrived in droves.

"The prosperity of the city" (said a writer in the *Siècle*) "is staggering. It seems impossible to believe that it is really the height of the holiday season with its flight from Paris, for the hotels are full, the restaurants are turning people away and the boulevards are crowded with visitors leisurely examining the beauties of the capital after having seen the Exhibition. Everything would be ideal if the cost of living had not gone up during the last few weeks at an alarming rate. We are told that this is only a passing evil and that after the Exhibition is closed things will return to normal. We hope so, but we must admit that we are not very optimistic."

The writer's pessimism was justified, for never were prices to drop back to the level so cherished by old Parisians. From this point of view the Exhibition of 1878 was to be the precursor of a period of economic stress which each successive exhibition, with its fresh inroads into the public purse, was to accentuate. But as yet the leakage was inconsiderable, and there were no complaining voices in the unanimous chorus of joy at the magnificent gesture which France was making to the world.

June 30th was declared a public holiday and a gala day at the Exhibition. All along the streets and in the squares platforms and balconies had been improvised, and for the first time in many years Parisians were able to revert to their old tradition of communal gaiety.

Alphand<sup>1</sup> had been appointed organizer of the day's festivities and Parliament had put 500,000 francs at his disposal. He indeed surpassed himself.

"I do not suppose" (wrote M. de la Marène), "that such illuminations and decorations have ever been seen, or such a spectacle as that of the whole population

<sup>1</sup> Jean-Charles Adolphe Alphand, the distinguished engraver and architect of public works.

of Paris, class distinctions ignored, massed together in the streets, revelling in the sentiments of patriotic joy and recovered self-esteem. There was not a single jarring outcry, not a single false note.”<sup>1</sup>

The cynosure of all eyes was, of course, the Trocadéro.

“The first impression” (said an anonymous writer in the *Revue de France*) “is astounding. It may be Assyrian or Moresque or Byzantine, but it certainly takes your breath away. It is impossible to appraise this enormous erection at first sight. It is not in the style of any particular epoch; rather it combines them all. It is magnificent by daylight, seen from some distance off: but at night, viewed, say, from the windows of the École Militaire, it is distinctly odd. The white silhouette, with its flanking minarets, framed in the darkness of the night, is like nothing so much as a gigantic ass’s head with two upstanding ears.”

“Well, it is an addition to the sights of Paris, anyhow,” was the general, if equivocal, verdict.

. . . . .

But the newspapers of the period cannot be taken as the most reliable index to public opinion. Occupied as they were with their own little parochial quarrels, they cut a rather shabby figure. The freedom for which they had shrieked so loudly under the Empire had not brought forth either a better type of journalism or an improved news service. They still thought and wrote in terms of the cliques in the cafés, even when their words were ostensibly addressed to a wider public. They still chattered endlessly about little incidents whose details could only be known by the initiate; they still continued to circulate incredible and unfounded rumours without troubling to verify them, so long as they were scandalous and calculated to serve the political ends of the paper.

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire de la République*, Vol. II (Plon).

An epigram, an anecdote, or a cock-and-bull story were still the fundamental ingredients of their columns.

The proof of this is that the "leaders" of the Press under the Empire still held undisputed sway, with Émile de Girardin at their head. After 1870 it had seemed that his role was played out. He had just sold *La Liberté* to Léonce Detroyat. He was rich and he seemed to have retired to his very sumptuous tent. But that devil of a man had journalism in his blood. It was not enough for him to receive every day, from seven o'clock till eleven, a horde of visitors retailing all the scandal of the capital; to rise at daybreak and to write, in lieu of newspaper articles, continual pamphlets on current events. He had to fight with his pen.

In May 1872 he bought the *Journal Officiel de la République Française* and the *Petit Journal Officiel*. Now he was back on his hobby-horse. His political opinions had changed; he was reconciled to Thiers; he had become a Republican. From May 16th onwards he was one of the most implacable enemies of the MacMahon régime.

Thiers himself had been the instrument of this conversion. On becoming chief magistrate, one of his first ideas was to wreak poetic justice on his old enemy Girardin by nominating him as senator. When he announced this intention to Dufaure there was consternation.

"You can't possibly do that," ejaculated M. Dufaure, raising his hands to heaven.

"But, my dear fellow," said Thiers, "Girardin is just as much for the Government as you or I."

"Nonsense. He has betrayed every successive Government one after the other."

"Well, he must have served them all, or he wouldn't have been able to betray them," countered Thiers.

The affair had no sequel in fact, but it came, of course, to the ears of Girardin, who became more resolute than ever in his support of the Republican régime against its enemies.

Another representative journalist of the first ten years

after the Empire was Pierre Varon, the owner of *Charivari*. Elegant and frigidly polite, with his waxed moustache, and his chest perpetually thrust out a little, he affected a pose of great dignity, addressing his colleagues as from some lofty and distant pedestal. He instituted a system of not paying for anything over a hundred lines. "Make it brief, gentlemen, make it brief." And he added, "No article in the world is worth more than fifteen francs. That's my rate."

He should have said that it was his rate for other people, for he took care that he himself received the maximum prices for his own contributions in the *Siècle* or *Figaro*.

A celebrated contributor to *Charivari* was the caricaturist Cham, who always carried his little dog Bijou about with him. He was long, lean, and very bald, and he was wont to explain the latter by saying that his hairs were so giddy that they quite naturally fell off.

He was as remarkable for his verbal repartee as for his drawings. Replying to a deputy who had been extolling the salutary effect of solitary confinement on prisoners he said, "What about the tapeworm? Is he improved by having a cell to himself?"

Cham was a Legitimist and took no pains to disguise his opinions. And so he might be seen talking with old white-headed Daumier, who spent his last years making a melancholy tour of the Paris newspaper offices, before going to his absinthe at the Café Helder.

If not quite as bitter as under the Empire, the relations between the newspapers and the censorship were often sharp enough. *Le Sifflet*, which was run by a certain Michel Anézo, was summoned almost every other week to the Ministry of the Interior because its proofs affronted the censors.

"I don't know what this drawing purports to represent," they would say, "but it seems to be full of insulting allusions to the Government."

"Indeed? But what are they?"

"That pig in the corner, wallowing in the mud, seems to us to resemble M. de Broglie."



"Well, you said it."

"You may not have meant it, of course, but there is no doubt that the public would get that impression. And the wood-cutter attacking the tree looks remarkably like Émile de Girardin about to launch another of his attacks on the Government. No, this cartoon won't do."

"Oh, all right then. We'll just have a nice little picture of Saint Joseph."

The *Carillon*, too, was always in trouble with the censors. Whatever animal its cartoonist portrayed they would be bound to detect in it a likeness to Marshal MacMahon. If the artist drew a complete menagerie they would identify the whole Ministry. It was a never-ending war, in which, however, the offenders quite frequently came out on top.

After Girardin retired from *La Liberté*, this paper, under Léonce Detroyat, became one of the principal journals of the day, ranking with *L'Événement* or *Figaro*. Detroyat was a remarkable figure. Formerly a naval lieutenant, he had taken part in the expedition to Mexico and had brought back the ill-fated Princess Charlotte to France. He returned to marry a great-niece of Girardin's and went into journalism, but only reluctantly, as his great ambition was always to become a singer. He boasted a very good baritone voice and vented his repertoire wherever he happened to be, writing an article or correcting proofs, so that the walls of the *Liberté* offices literally shook at the voice of their editor.

An even odder figure was Magnier, the proprietor of *L'Événement*. Magnier was a legend on the boulevards. His debts, his creditors, his thousand and one ways of raising money, provided inexhaustible gossip for thirty years. Every journalist between 1870 and 1890 had collected anecdotes of Magnier, but his colleagues naturally dispensed the choicest vintage.

He was an inimitable figure, straight out of Balzac. For thirty years he managed to run the best-informed and most amusing paper in Paris without ever knowing whether the next day would bring in enough money to

enable him to issue a number. He had pockets like sieves; money flowed through his fingers with inconceivable rapidity, and he was constantly making frantic and futile efforts to hold a little of it back. Everything was fish that came to his net. He invented the method of disguised publicity, of paid social announcements, of payments for "silence" when convenient, or conversely for "attacks" when considered advisable.

When Georges Duval first joined *L'Événement* he reports that he was just a little disturbed at overhearing the following conversation in the reporters' room:

"What are you on?"

"A review of Madame L——'s new book."

"But Magnier says he doesn't want any more literary articles!"

"Well, he only commissioned it this morning."

"Oh, I suppose it's paid for, then?"

"No. It isn't paid for, but you see Madame L—— is the mistress of a banker from whom Magnier has hopes. . . ."

"Well, I'm afraid to write a line about anybody in case he turns out to be one of Magnier's creditors. The other day I put in a puff of the Comte d'Essone's ball, and Magnier howled the place down because the Comte once dunned him for fifteen hundred francs. Only yesterday I wrote a note about Paul de Sézénay. 'Sézénay,' screamed Magnier. 'A man who tells everybody I owe him three hundred francs. What next!'"

"I'll tell you a better one than that. Last month the Théâtre Ambigu was going to produce *La Femme du Veuf*. On the eve of the first night Magnier went to Dollingen to ask for a loan, which the latter promised on condition that Magnier would 'cut up' *La Femme du Veuf*, whose author, Libert, had once ridiculed Dollingen in a scurrilous rag. Magnier came to me and said: 'Write me a slashing attack on the thing.'

"But Libert was not the sole author of *La Femme du Veuf*. His collaborator was Fussot, and Fussot was the director of the Loterie du Nord. To attack Fussot, reflected Magnier, was to lose a subsidy; to praise Libert

was to lose a loan. So, under his instruction, I wrote the following: 'In *La Femme du Veuf* we can plainly recognize the skilful hand of the talented M. Fussot. But why has he allowed himself to be burdened with a collaborator? Is there to be no limit to these dramatic concubinages? . . .'

Every night Magnier's contributors hung around the office with anxiety writ plain upon their faces. Were they going to get paid? They argued and speculated until, at last, his carriage was sighted, and then, like a match to a train of powder, word would be passed round that Magnier had no money but was giving still more notes.

These "notes" were scraps of paper on which the proprietor had written "Good for 100 francs (or 200 francs or 300 francs) and payable next Monday." And when Monday came and the notes were presented to the cashier he would say either that he had no money or that he had received no instructions. The unfortunate holders of the "notes" would still keep alive a spark of hope for the next few days, and anyhow, no one ever got really angry. Magnier had a way with him that cut short all discussion. Not even Scholl or Claretie dared to show his teeth, for every now and then Magnier would throw them a few louis, when he had it.

If Magnier was the most picturesque figure of the newspaper world, Villemessant of the *Figaro* was the most celebrated. There was a Villemessant legend as well as a Magnier legend, and the combined myths of both were inexhaustible.

Villemessant was the complete newspaper man, the man who was so haunted by news that he had to manufacture it if it was not forthcoming elsewhere. Dependent as he was almost entirely upon popular support, he was much more easily influenced by public rumour and gossip than any of the other great editorial figures of the day. Whether he chanced to be in a restaurant, a theatre, or any other public place, the first criticism he happened to overhear from any fool discussing his contributors was seized upon by Villemessant and elevated

to the position of reigning criterion. He would rush back to his office, enraptured or enraged, as the case might be, send immediately for the writer, and compliment or dismiss him on the spot.

This habit of his was common knowledge, and interested persons consequently made a practice of engaging a table at one of his favourite restaurants and loudly praising or blackguarding a certain article in Villemessant's hearing. Nine times out of ten the trick worked.

Every Wednesday he used to dine at Bonvalet's in the boulevard du Temple with a number of wealthy business men. After dinner they would play heavily, and the next day, round about twelve o'clock, the staff of *Figaro* would await their master's arrival in fear and trembling. If the cards had gone against him, he would be in the most evil rage, and the first man to offend him would most certainly be flung into the street. But when he had won he was excessively liberal, and honorariums were freely distributed.

Certainly these were trying times for harassed journalists, but it must be remembered that the prestige of *Figaro* was then very high and the profession of journalism extremely precarious.

Finally, there were, of course, mad journalists then as always. The lunatic of the period was one Guyot Monpayroux, who had once edited the *Courier de France* with Robert Mitchell, and ended by running it alone. Gifted with a ready wit, a facile pen, and hail-fellow-well-met at all the cafés, few people foresaw his melancholy end. He became obsessed by the delusion that he had access to inexhaustible riches, and proclaimed that he had 30 milliards of francs in his possession with which to ransom Alsace-Lorraine from Germany. One day he announced that he was going to give a magnificent dinner to all his old colleagues on the *Courier*, and that, at the end of the dinner, he was going to give each one of them a million francs with the dessert.

A million francs, to a journalist! Nobody doubted now that Guyot Monpayroux was mad, and the same night he was taken away to an asylum.

## CHAPTER V

### DEMOCRACY CREEPS IN

so far we have simply been surveying a post-mortem prolongation of the life of the Second Empire. There is nothing either in art, letters, science, or craftsmanship which has the slightest smack of revolution. The world of 1878 was the world of 1855 or 1869 in everything except the nominal form of government. The Republic was only a name; there was no sign of the ferment of art, of the approaching pontificate of science, of the vast increase of mechanical progress. Prudence, moderation and order were the maxims which governed the world of ideas; the revolutionary notions of 1848 seemed lost in the darkness of forgotten time.

But a new breath arose in the year 1880, still only a faint breath with little tang of that violence and harshness which was to mark it out in history. But that breath was to become a hurricane with extraordinary rapidity. The full blast of liberty caught up the mind of the times in a dervish dance of enfranchisement; then, as ever, freedom appearing suddenly engendered every sort of excess. And it is this excess which we have to chronicle in all its ramifications during the next twenty years.

Political life is marked by a series of movements tending to one or other extreme, or at least to what was then considered extreme—Radicalism or Boulangism. In art, the naturalistic school, beginning as a protest, was to establish itself triumphantly all along the line. In the financial and business world, gigantic operations and co-operations, abounding naturally in equally gigantic frauds and failures, were to bring home the reality of the new order to a people little accustomed to consider the fluctuations of the Bourse as having any direct reflection on their daily lives.

Finally and predominantly, Science (with a capital S) was to impose itself on all. The scientist has become, little by little, the grand conductor of the world's

symphony orchestra. The Exhibition of 1889, at the end of this first decade of scientific progress, marked his first triumph and the first public appreciation of his new role.

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That Marshal MacMahon should have been swept out of the Élysée by the lawyer Jules Grévy was in itself a breach between the old order, aristocratic, religious, and conservative, and the new order, ostensibly dominated by the professional classes and the wealthy *bourgeoisie*, but more and more eroded by the waves of the lower middle classes and by the proletariat. This was evident from the first of the new receptions at the Élysée: it was to be increasingly evident later on.

It was not that Grévy himself was so terrible. Edmond About said of him that he drank and ran after women and was consequently an ideal President of the French. He was one of those jovial men who are by no means devoid of guile, and he could be just as impressive as anybody else in a frock-coat.

The significance of Monsieur Grévy lay not so much in his personality or his class as in the fact that, for the first time, the premier magistrate of the Republic had been chosen from the professed and uncompromising enemies of the old régime. If it could not quite be said of Grévy that he was "the good companions' president," he was certainly favoured by all the journalists in the Café de Madrid, to whom he was supposed to have said immediately on his election, "Come and lunch at the Élysée whenever you like. Just look on it as your home."

Certainly, from the time he took possession of it, the famous palace became the most humdrum of middle-class residences. Henceforth there were to be no fêtes and no galas. The President lived in voluntary retirement maintaining a discretion verging on absolute silence with his entourage. He seemed to have fallen into a tranced sleep from the afternoon of his arrival.

The faithful guardian of the Constitution, jealously shut up in his palace, provided little copy for the newspapers. He took a daily walk through the park to the lake

and fed the ducks. Back in the palace, he would receive his callers and show them out himself with an elaborate courtesy which concealed, says one witness, a certain vacancy of mind. He always seemed to be immensely tired.

Every Sunday the clash of steel resounded. One of the large *salons* on the ground floor was converted into a duelling ground, where the president's son-in-law, Daniel Wilson, a mediocre swordsman but passionately devoted to the art, assembled his fellow enthusiasts. Sword-play was all the vogue then. It had been brought into fashion by Jacob, of the Faubourg Montmartre, and it was he who presided over the sessions at the Élysée. The combatants were generally asked to stay on to lunch by the President or Madame Wilson, and as soon as coffee was over they would begin to play billiards, at which both Grévy and his son-in-law were very proficient.

When chess and shooting (once his favourite sport) have been added to this catalogue of amusements, the distractions of this President who pretended to make the Élysée into a comfortable middle-class home are complete.

He had a horror of official receptions, and he did not hesitate to permit himself to be overcome by fatigue. He was so regularly to be found on these occasions, towards the end of the evening, asleep in a certain corner that his intimates always went straight there to look for him.

The great world went on around him—the balls, the dinners, the receptions for distinguished foreigners. Among the Republican aristocracy and the more distinguished administrators and civil servants who thronged the *salons*, there began to appear certain persons “always bearded and with long black ties bisecting their shirt fronts”.<sup>1</sup> They would promenade in silence, contemptuously surveying the worldly time-serving throng. These were the *Proscrits*, intransigent Republicans silently manifesting the purity of their ideals among these mirrored *salons* whose panels still bore the flower-enwreathed initials “N” and “E”.

But the new order demanded something more tangibly

<sup>1</sup> Robert de Bonnières: *Mémoires d'aujourd'hui*, Vol. I, p. 23.

democratic than these receptions. They wanted spectacles and free shows on a large scale, and at the Hôtel de Ville they got them.

For some years the building had been in course of reconstruction. At last the work was sufficiently far advanced to permit the organization of a fête in the reception-rooms. The date chosen was July 13th 1882, and it was decided to make this a really democratic occasion. Hundreds were invited to the banquet, and thousands of invitations for the dance which was to follow were showered on the citizens.

And the President of the Republic was to preside over the affair in person.

Freycinet, the President of the Council, and all the Ministers, Charles Floquet, the Seine Préfet, and all those in any way connected with the administrative staff of the Hôtel de Ville were there, together with foreign Ministers and certain prominent people such as Victor Hugo, whose presence would be certain to arouse popular enthusiasm.

The banquet was fixed very early, at six o'clock, so as to allow as long as possible for the dancing which followed. From two in the afternoon onwards an immense and noisy crowd began to gather in the vicinity of the Hôtel de Ville until the streets around were black with people.

Under the command of regular army officers, squads of cadets from the military schools gave displays in the square for the edification of the spectators. They received their usual enthusiastic reception, for ever since the war these military cadets, the hopes of the future *revanche*, were enormously popular with the Parisians.

Punctually at six o'clock Monsieur Grévy arrived and entered the building to the strains of the "Marseillaise."

Five immense tables filled the banqueting-hall. The official speeches were up to the usual standard of grandiloquent fatuity: as usual they celebrated "the launching of the vessel of State in new waters", praised "the motherland of art and letters", "the charm of the Parisienne and the incomparable quality of the City of Light". These rites accomplished, there was a rush from the tables so that



the attendants could magically dispose of the two thousand glasses, the four thousand plates and the five hundred napkins with a rapidity over which the next day's newspapers were to wax lyrical.

Victor Hugo, a little overwhelmed, was ceremoniously conducted to his carriage by Monsieur Floquet, and then at nine o'clock the *salons* were ready for the inrush of the two thousand chosen with their precious little pieces of pink pasteboard, who had been fretting outside for two hours or more.

And then began a scene which the newspapers were to describe as "unbelievable", "incredible", and "unparalleled". Looking out on the uncharted seas of democratic revelry from the little room reserved for the diplomats, the Préfet of the Seine anxiously inquired of one of his subordinates, "Are you quite sure you can depend upon the police?"

Thousands of anecdotes about this celebrated ball are current. Substantial dames from the markets turned up in full regalia; numbers of electors came in lounge suits and some even kept their hats on, until firmly reprimanded by the attendants. There was almost a riot round the buffet. Bottles of champagne disappeared wholesale; broken sandwiches and cakes flew through the air and littered the corners of the room; while it was rumoured that two thousand cigars had vanished while the banqueting-tables were being removed. There were stories of pocketed silver, of mountains of broken glass, and of pitched battles raging round the possession of a cream cake.

All this was doubtless exaggerated grossly. Rumour and the Press alike were evidently in sore need of lessons in democracy.

And while this orgy was taking place within, outside on the balconies singers from the Opéra discoursed the "Marseillaise" from full throats to the surging crowd below, a scene which, on that summer night, was not without imaginative grandeur, as even the most rabid of the anti-Governmental journals was moved to announce on the morrow.

It was not only in the political world that the disappearance of the old values was to show so markedly. In the world of art, letters, and journalism the battle for "naturalism" was raging. It had been carried on for ten years previously by the most determined partisans of the school, and now Zola and his colleagues were on the eve of their triumph.

In a curious entry in his Journal, Edmond de Goncourt remarks to the Princess Mathilde that it was the Empire's own fault that the author of *Les Rougon-Macquart* turned Republican.

"Zola was penniless" (said de Goncourt to the Princess) "and he had a mother and a family to keep. The only papers which would take his articles were the republican ones. And, working with these men, he adopted their views—as was only to be expected. You will never know, Princess, how great were the services which you rendered to the Tuileries, how many hatreds and envies you have dispersed, what a buffer you were between the Government and the more acrimonious of the scribes. Take Flaubert and me, if we had not been bought over, so to speak, by your grace, your charm, and your kindness, we should both have been among the most implacable of the enemies of the Emperor and the Empress."

It is possible that the *salons* did in fact exercise a moderating effect, politically, upon these two writers whose literary creed was so revolutionary, but it must not be forgotten that they both were by birth and fortune naturally allied to the aristocratic and wealthy classes. But Edmond de Goncourt could not deny that despite the Princesse Mathilde the whole tendency of the literary work of the period was towards a literal and scientific verisimilitude, however brutal or unpalatable that verisimilitude might be, and that a tendency of that kind must inevitably end, as it did end, in the gutter which it sought, with whatever motive. De Goncourt himself, the exquisite narrator of *René Maupérin*, had descended

in *Germinie Lacerteux* to a world where manners and taste were unknown. And he was to descend further with *La Fille Elisa*.

The spirit of scientific inquiry, under whose auspices Zola had begun his examination of the destinies of the Rougon-Macquart family, even more quickly identified itself with democracy, for the spirit of scientific inquiry is ranged first in inevitable opposition to revealed truth as such, until it comes to mean simply "advanced" ideas on all political, religious, and moral subjects, as opposed to traditional ones.

The immense influence of the scientific writing of the time imposed itself on everything. Darwin's *Origin of Species* and Bernard's *Experimental Philosophy* were published during the lifetime of the Second Empire, as were the earlier writings of Renan, Taine, and Fustel de Coulanges, which were so directly influenced by the former, and by the year 1880 the flood was at its height, and there was no department of art and letters remaining undated.

Zola with his theory of naturalism may be taken as the most representative writer of this particular epoch. For him novel-writing was a branch of scientific inquiry, and the novelist must be a scientist. His creed is significant. He states: "I am a positivist, an evolutionist, a materialist."

The critical examination which Sainte-Beuve applied to literary history and Taine to history itself, Zola tried to turn on to the fictitious history of the personages he invented. For the wayward caprices of human imagination he desired to substitute the precise and calculable automata of scientific observation. And he set himself to his task with indomitable energy and purpose.

He did not shirk the labour, the boredom, or the fatigue necessary to obtain documentary verisimilitude—that is to say, a scientific description of a fact. Domestic by temperament, there was no curious by-way of life that he would not explore if his work demanded it. He went down into a mine to see how the miners lived; he would travel with an engine-driver; spend whole nights in the

markets watching the labourers; wade through breviaries and orders of ritual; follow sessions of the Bourse, and apply himself to botany or natural history.

With his pencil always in his hand and his ears always alert for what they might pick up, he was to impose himself upon the public imagination as the typical author, a kind of superior reporter (before the word was current) an indefatigable note-taker of everything that he saw and heard.

Pushed as they were beyond the bounds of moderation, such habits were bound to result in some ludicrous scenes, when the novelist would vest himself with the bland omniscience of the savant, fondly imagining that he had in a few hours mastered the secrets of ways of living which were utterly remote from him.

There is an amusing story of how, when writing *L'Assommoir*, he wished to investigate the household of a wealthy financier in order to describe the residence of his character, Sac. So he procured an invitation to a reception where, indifferent to the laws of courtesy and the people around him, insensible to the great artists who had been engaged to sing and to play, Zola rummaged through one room after another, scrutinizing the furniture and the pictures, and entering in his note-book, with the cold accuracy of an auctioneer, the precise inventory of what he saw.

A similar adventure, in a different *milieu*, befell him when he was writing *Nana*. Having no acquaintance among light ladies of the wealthier sort, but insistent all the same upon absolute accuracy, he accepted an invitation to dine with a celebrated courtesan whose clientèle included some of the most notable men of the time. The house was bewildering in its opulence; the richness of the silks and the carpets and the silver was almost dazzling. Before dinner he had made a sheaf of notes and was engaged in appraising things. At dinner he was asked to the hostess's table with some of the best talkers in Paris. Zola appeared to see nothing and to hear nothing. He did not say a word. Presently, it seemed as though he wanted to speak, and a respectful silence was accorded for the

celebrated novelist. It was a prolonged silence. At last Zola said:

"How high is your ceiling, madame?"

The reply was put down in the note-book.

On leaving the table he asked permission to inspect his hostess's bedroom. It was not granted.

And so, above all and everywhere, the "document" (tomorrow it was going to be called the "slice of life") was the basis of the new school. Whether it was Alphonse Daudet with his scenes of passionate emotion, J. K. Huysmans with his relentless realism, Léon Hennique, Paul Alexis, Edmond de Goncourt, or Jules Vallès, all based their attitude upon the literary formula of the Third Republic.

But the new cult was not going to stop with the new school of novelists. It was going much further. It was to influence journalism, manners, and morals. The passion for crude realism led inevitably to an increase of pornography. What truth might have gained morality certainly lost. The most scandalous of publications and spectacles were born one day and suppressed the next, and for a quarter of a century the fight between the censorship and the offenders was waged unremittingly.

Curiously enough, amid all this ferment of ideas the French theatre, which has always played so considerable a part on social life, remained quite unprogressive. The case for naturalism had been pleaded and granted in letters; it suffered setback after setback in the theatre. In 1872 *L'Arlésienne* failed, despite Bizet's music; in 1882 *Les Corbeaux* by Henry Becque, Zola's *Thérèse Raquin*, *Michel Pauper* and *La Parisienne* all failed. The public which revelled in *Nana* and *Sapho* declined to extend its support to plays inspired by a similar aesthetic and remained obstinately faithful to Scribe and Sardou.

The man who was to change all this was Antoine with his Théâtre-Libre.

Everybody now knows how this humble employee of a gas company, passionately attached to the theatre from his earliest youth and believing fervently in his destiny, found the means, though without money or influence, to

stage a programme which included *Jacques Damour*, a play by Léon Hennique based on Zola's novel.

The play attracted the attention of the Press, and the newspaper articles proved to be a lighted train to powder. Paris was alight, and Antoine, despite an almost desperate financial situation, found the means to carry on to success; and the little room in the Passage de l'Élysée-des-Beaux-Arts became one of the most sought-after places for smart Parisian first nights.

The audience was restricted to subscribers and guests, an ingenious method devised by Antoine both to raise immediate cash and to outwit the censor. The Passage de l'Élysée-des-Beaux-Arts is off the Place Pigalle, and about eight o'clock in the evening crowds of smart Parisians and Parisiennes could be found picking their way through the booths of the fair,<sup>1</sup> and scrutinizing through their eyeglasses the names of streets on the tablets in the hope of discovering the famous but obscure turning. At last they would find it and penetrate into the little hall, naïvely ornamented with primitive decoration like a village concert-room.

"You could shake hands with the actors across the footlights" (said Jules Lemaître) "and stretch your legs out into the prompter's box. The stage was so small that only the most elementary scenic attempts were possible, and the audience was so close that illusion was an impossibility. We could feel ourselves akin to the spectators of the great days of the theatre, the fellows of Shakespeare and Molière."

Crowded on the benches, for there were no chairs in this exiguous "theatre", were such leading lights of the Parisian literary, artistic, and social worlds as Henri Fouquier, Zola, Francisque Sarcey, Jean Richepin, François Coppée, Paul Arène, Coquelin, Duez, and Chabrier.

There would be also a number of fashionable ladies, their heads adorned with paradise feathers—the great craze of the moment—secured by a fine and almost

<sup>1</sup> The fair of Montmartre lasted down to the opening of the present century.

invisible gold band. Their long-waisted bodices were outlined by braid to form a *plastron* in front, and their busts were adorned with Oriental jewellery, Byzantine crosses, Italian filigree pendants, and the like. Their elaborate shoes were embroidered velvet, plush or kid, and as it was the fashion to show them, skirts were accordingly curtailed.

Some of the more elegant started a mode for pastel colours—soft blues and greys, pale faded rose and ivory—with a spray of lilac or a posy of forget-me-nots for sole ornament.

Such a public was taken by storm at the originality of the scene, the unusual surroundings and the unforced but moving simplicity of the players. Antoine, Mevisto, and Burguet in Brieux's *L'Évasion*, Louise France and Felici Mallet in *La Fin de Lucie Pellegrin*, Henri Mayer in *L'École des Veufs*, held the stage without artifice, exaggeration, or sacrifice of reality. No more ranting, no more declaiming, no more forced pathos. Actual life was being lived out on the boards, with a fidelity which the audience had never known or had forgotten.

And so, having triumphantly taken possession of the novel, realism invaded the stage. Not only in Paris but throughout Europe the battle was won, and the realistic formula, so admirably suited to the concepts of the moment, became the stock-in-trade of every would-be dramatist for the next twenty years.

It was also to conquer pictorial art, through the work of its chief adepts, Manet, Roll, and Henri Gervex. The first had always been a rebel and had struggled for years to get his work accepted by the authorities, but the two latter, and particularly the last named, established themselves and their aesthetic creed at a single stroke.

In his decorations for the Mairie of a Parisian ward, Henri Gervex displayed the same qualities of force, direct vision and boldness of conception as the most determined partisans of the Goncourt school could demand. His next work was the "*Premières Communiantes*", the treatment of which roused much controversy, but the culminating sensation, which unleashed a cyclone of criticism, was the famous "Rolla", painted when the artist was twenty-six.

Technically, the picture attempted to handle a very complicated lighting problem, but the sensation resided in the realism of various details, such as the tumbled underclothing by the bed heaped around the naked body of the woman, which were of hitherto unprecedented boldness.

Every one went to the *salon* to gaze at the picture which so signally embodied the revolutionary movement in painting. After several days the Ministry of fine Arts decided to be shocked, although nobody either in public or in the newspapers had raised a protest, and the picture was taken down from the exhibition.

The artist and his friends, all fervent partisans of the new movement, were not thus to be defeated. They hired a showroom in the rue Chaussée d'Antin where the picture could be displayed freely to the even larger crowds which flocked to see it, its undeniable artistry forming the most effective protest against official standards of taste.

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But a revolution does not stop where the more virtuous of its protagonists desire to arrest it. The abrupt change of taste from the agreeable romances of Edmond About to the brutal realities of Zola and his school gave an immense impetus to the manufacture of pornography, disguised very thinly or not at all. It is perhaps possible for a great artist to say anything without offence, but it is certainly impossible to prevent a horde of mediocre and disreputable writers from exploiting the freedom claimed. The naturalist creed, with its avowed predilection for "slices of life", resulted in the production of an immense number of "slices" of the rawest and dirtiest description. There is always a certain public for pornography, and there is also, unhappily, a still larger public liable to corruption. Despite the efforts of the censorship the French novel of the next decade is infected by a plague of obscenity.

But the demoralization of letters was as nothing compared with the demoralization of the Press. The newspapers, so recently released from a strict and indeed preposterous surveillance, were naturally bursting with



enthusiasm for the new order. An avalanche of scandalous sheets, with no trace of any other purpose but to regale their readers with indecent and libellous anecdotes, were born and flourished in the years following 1880. Most of them need not be exhumed, but there is one which despite its audacities must be reckoned in a class apart.

*Gil Blas* was founded by Auguste Dumont, a former printer who had risen to the editorial chair of *Figaro*. Villemessant had marked him out for what he was, a man who knew how to exact the most rigid economies and who would never permit a pennyworth of unjustified expenditure. His parsimony was notorious. Maximin Rude tells a story of how Villemessant arrived at the *Figaro* office one day to find the staff sitting idle with empty penholders.

"Well, what are you waiting for?"

Some one explained that they had no pens and were waiting for Dumont, who had gone out to buy some.

"You'd better send out the office-boy at once," said the proprietor. "Dumont will have gone all round the town to see where he can get them cheapest and you can be sure that he won't waste any money on 'bus fares."

So prudent a man was bound to succeed, and during his association with *Figaro*, Dumont amassed a modest fortune which, after he left Villemessant, enabled him to run several profitable weeklies and finally led him to found *Gil Blas*.

Shrewd and malicious, with cold, lightning-blue eyes that summed a man up in a glance, Dumont was well able to scent whence the wind blew. The heat of the literary battle around the naturalist standard, the growth of public appetite for audacities and crudities, gave him the idea of combining both in a weekly where literature should have a serious place, while the utmost frankness and audacity should characterize the general matter.

The new journal was obviously modelled on *Figaro* in externals, and the whole of the front page was given over to the gossip of Paris, artistic, literary, social, and merely scandalous, thus linking the new journalism with the intimate gossip sheets of the old régime.

But there was more than that in *Gil Blas*, for Dumont had gathered round him some of the ablest writers of the day. Theodore de Banville, Henry Fouquier (under the pseudonym of Columbine), Jean Richepin, Armand Silvestre and Émile Villemont were among those whose stories and sketches soon made the paper the best exemplar of the weekly of the period. And when, some few years later, Fernand Xau reduced the price to five centimes, the democratization of the French literary newspaper was complete.

Of all the editorial staff the Baron de Vaux (known as the Diable Boiteux from the signature of his inflammatory front page) was the most in demand. Day by day his door was besieged by rakes of both sexes, would-be duellists, flashy actresses and innumerable flotsam and jetsam whom he would receive with equal familiarity.

"Oh, it's you, is it? Well, what do you want?"

And he would usher them in with a conciliatory pat on the back rather like the pat and the lump of sugar given to a restive horse.

The Baron de Vaux was the recognized authority on that considerable and diverse section of Parisian society conveniently known as "the boulevards", to whom his "echoes" served at once as a flail and a profitable advertisement. People simultaneously hoped and dreaded to be pilloried in an "echo", and it was not without fear and trembling that pretty little Thespian aspirants gathered round his door.

So it was all very picturesque and amusing in the office of *Gil Blas*, down to the commissionaire who had once been a drummer in the Army, and who used to parade the daily muster of pretty ladies before the Baron or Dumont with a military flourish and a salute which made the former call the ceremony "reviewing the troops of Cytherea".

After Dumont, the paper was run by a certain René d'Hubert, a young man of good family and irreproachable elegance, but animated by a passion for appearing and disappearing, popping in at one door and out of another, which made his presence on the paper always a matter for

speculation. But the journal continued to flourish, and to the brilliant galaxy of its contributors were added such rising stars as Guy de Maupassant, Catulle Mendès, and Abel Hermant. *Gil Blas* remained the premier literary paper of Paris until it was outstripped first by the *Echo de Paris* and finally by the *Journal*.

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Below *Gil Blas*, very far below indeed, comes the long list of more or less scabrous journals that were the public plague of the period. In them the wit of their prototype gave place to flat indecency, and its barbed innuendo to a brutal outspokenness. The very titles of these papers, which were pursued unremittingly by the censor, are evocative of the period. M. Charles Virmaître<sup>1</sup> has preserved them for our curious contemplation.

There was the *Boudoir*, appearing in 1880, *L'Événement Parisien*, *Le Piron*, *Le Bocace*, *Le Decameron*, *La Lanterne des Cochons de Paris*, *La Grivoiserie Parisienne*, *L'Asticot*, *Le Rabelais*, *L'Alphonse et Nana*, all dating from the same year. Prosecutions were numerous: in one year the proprietors and editors of *L'Événement Parisien* received two years' imprisonment and were fined six thousand francs; *Le Piron* got thirteen months, *Bocace* nine months, *La Grivoiserie Parisienne* two months, and so on.

The odium of pre-eminence among these filthy productions must be awarded to one called *La Bavarde*. This united the industry of blackmail with that of pornography, and it employed a network of correspondents all over the country. The moment one of these caught wind of a scandal the news was posted to the editor hot-foot, where it was embroidered and broadcast up and down France. This journal was proscribed with fines and imprisonments by almost every provincial bench.

The naturalist school did not escape detraction through this flood of base literature which naturally furnished effective ammunition for its opponents. The dividing line between the advanced naturalists and the unalloyed pornographers was so thinly marked that many failed to

<sup>1</sup> Charles Virmaître: *Paris-Canard*.

discern it. The tardy recognition accorded to so genuine and disinterested a writer as Zola himself may doubtless be set down to this very natural confusion in the minds of his readers.

The reputable Press was united in its front against the offending publications. "The ashes of these shameful papers," wrote *Le Temps* on December 28th 1880, "fall on the bier of the departing year, whose epitaph can only be: *Here lies 1880, the year of obscenity.*"

And as, in France, everything ends up with a song, the revues chronicled the characteristics of the Press of the period. "*Achetez vit, Messieurs, le journal scandaleux,*" sang charming Alice Lavigne at the Variétés.

For realism and outspokenness were not going to stop at the novel, the *salon*, the theatre, or the Press. They were to make themselves felt in the daily life of Paris, in the very air of the city. For the time was coming when Montmartre was to be born—Montmartre of the legend, Montmartre of the cabarets.

A year after the foundation of *Gil Blas*, Salis founded Le Chat Noir.

This event is something more significant than the introduction of a new note in entertainment, or a passing wave of taste. The brilliant group of artists and poets who gathered round Salis reincarnated the authentic French satiric spirit, dead among us for so many years. What a galaxy of names that was, from Samain to Ajalbert, from Rollinat to Haraucourt, right down to Willette, who, at the outbreak of war was conducting the eternal duel with the prudent and respectable with such wit and enjoyment. Something native, original, and not without value was expressed by the swashbucklers of Montmartre, those men who stepped straight into legend with their wide-brimmed hats and flowing ties.

They originated from the naturalist movement, but their attraction was that they brought something else into it—a spice of satire, tight-lipped and unsmiling in the English fashion, which Émile Goudeau, Alphonse Allais, and Jules Jouy raised to perfection.

To the singers came the poets and the novelists, and

then the artists and the designers: Steinlen with his beloved cats, Caran d'Ache with his soldiers, and Henri Rivière, who loved the street life of the city.

The Chat Noir was a microcosm of the life of the time in medieval setting. It was at once a café, a restaurant, a literary club and a studio for painters and scene designers. The waiters wore academic dress, and Salis addressed his clients as "Messeigneurs", receiving them with the most flattering and dignified formality. Paris has never had anything to equal that famous cabaret, which from 1881 to 1889 was the unique sight of the capital, but the Montmartrois cabaret has remained for fifty years the guardian of our native wit, upon that historic hill from which were launched so many barbed arrows against the hides of the powers that be.

A few doors away there was a very different scene, so directly inspired by the literature of the naturalistic school that it faded away with the passing of their vogue.

This was the Cabaret Mirliton of Aristide Bruant.

That the sombre imagination of Zola could ever have impressed itself upon manners or taste is due almost entirely to Aristide Bruant. For it was he who first exploited, to an ever-growing public, the sinister fascination of the underworld of Paris, with its prostitutes and apaches, its blackmailers, bullies, and thieves, its evil brooding atmosphere oozing out into crime by stifling days and murky nights. This was the "emancipated" world which from now on was to become an official literary hunting-ground, a mine which poets and novelists were to explore with unabated zest for many years to come.

It rapidly became the fashion for "everybody" in Paris to be seen at Bruant's. A long line of carriages struggled up the hill, bearing a crowd of fashionable people eager to experience the delightful shivers to be encountered in the proximity of this strange, long-haired man, with his scarlet muffler and his trousers of black velvet billowing over his boots. As they entered the low smoke-filled room, furnished only with rough benches and tables, Bruant would accost them in the argot of the underworld,

going round the tables to hurl coarse invective at the fashionable ladies, who would blush and pale and shudder with delight.

"Shut your row, blast you all!" he would cry, thumping the table. "I'm going to sing."

This was a typical Parisian night's amusement in 1885 or thereabouts. Hardly ten years before, the Marshal and his wife had been leading the decorous waltz at the Élysée, under the glittering mirrors and past the flower-wreathed panels that still supported "N" and "E".

The Montmartre fashion led to the revival of the café concert, always dear to the French heart. But, inevitably, the café concert had become *naturaliste* too.

It was to attain the zenith of its popularity during the next few years. A huge, good-natured audience, equally avid for sentimental ballad or dirty joke, sighed with the pathetic singers, guffawed with the comic, exchanged cross-talk with the comedians and shouted the roof off for the favourite stars.

There was Theresa, Duparc, Dumay, Paulus—and how many other interpreters of the mood of the hour in the songs which were hourly improvised to meet it? There was "The Pig's Trotter Waltz", supposed to be inspired by Zola's "Ventre de Paris", with its refrain:

He calls me his little pig's chitterling  
I call him my own lump of dung.

There was "La Femme Athlète", whose exploits were featured by a celebrated grotesque *diseuse*, and there were, of course, heart-searching sentimental ballads just as in the days when the life of Paris was caught up in song by Béranger, long before the shadow of Meudon had fallen on the people who gathered, by summer nights, in the thick-leaved shadows of the Champs-Élysées bluntly outlined upon a star-strewn sky, their faces a vague blur save where an occasional gas-lamp shone down.

The enormous Jeanne Bloch, with an old *képi* on her head and a whip in her hand, flung out her raucous songs into these shadows; and there too was seen for the first time that apparition which was first to convulse and then

to enchant not only Paris but the world. The thin, nervous figure, at once ascetic and sensual, in the white dress and the long black gloves, with the harsh graveyard voice that sang mournfully of love's pleasures or articulated, in searing couplets, the cruel philosophy of a predatory world—Yvette Guilbert, living embodiment of the naturalist *credo* and rare artist who could enthrall alike the sophisticated and the simple.

Those were the days of the famous quadrille of the Moulin Rouge with Grille d'Egout, Nini Patte-en-l'air and Miss Rigolette, those frantic Corybantes whose cartwheels revealed frothing lace petticoats and voluminous frilled drawers to an excited audience. It was the day of the enormous hat and the big *chignon*, a period of exaggerated and clamant femininity excited by those strange new dances from which moralists predicted the ruin of society.

But now they seem harmless enough.

## CHAPTER VI

### BOULANGISM

WHILE public manners and morals were being transformed by the advent of naturalism, Monsieur Grévy, cosily wadded in his comfortable post, was trying to pursue his rosy dream of being the President without a history. Year by year he was finding it more difficult, for uncomfortable things persisted in happening.

First there was the Union Générale crash, which produced a financial panic with unpleasant reverberations in the political world.

This particular financial disaster, which anticipated the more sensational Panama affair by several years, coincided with the railway convention scandal, the jobbery in Tunis, and about half a dozen similar affairs. The Union Générale crash was the first of the large-scale financial disasters, and it came with an enormous shock to a public accustomed only to the cautious and circumspect conduct of affairs by prudent men of tried worth.

M. Bontout, the head of the Union Générale, was an able financier but temperamentally reckless; moreover, most of his experience had been obtained in Austria, where hazardous speculation has always been rife. He was a man whose ideas were all on the grandiose scale, and he aspired to make the Union Générale the biggest financial concern in the country, inflating his capital to an unprecedented extent.

The stock soared to a tremendous height, but round about the beginning of January 1882 rumour began to sharpen into anxiety—an anxiety sedulously fostered by the "bears". Not daring to halt the upward tendency, the Union Générale tried to call in the shares, and that proved to be the beginning of the end. From being quoted at 2,900 francs in the middle of January they dropped, first to 2,500, and then to 2,300. By January 25th they were at 2,000; by February 1st at 1,200; on the



2nd they dropped to 400, and on the 3rd to 100. It was a landslide down a slippery slope.

The announcement of the Union Générale's insolvency, together with the arrest of Bontout and Feder, fell like the explosion of a brooding thunder-cloud. Through an army of brokers, notaries, and other agents the Company had planted their scrip in almost every part of France. Most of the holders were people of small means—tradespeople, minor civil servants, artisans, and peasants. The Catholic community was especially hard-hit, and thousands of domestic servants and farm-labourers, following the example of their employers, who had implicit faith in Bontout, had invested their entire savings. It was a national disaster.

“Queues of people waited all day long outside the offices” (wrote *Figaro*). “The despair of these people who have lost everything is pitiable to contemplate. Numbers of priests were among them, and many women, weeping bitterly.”

The crash engendered a widespread discontent whose full extent was not immediately apparent. The working classes tended to blame the Government for this and the many following financial disasters of the next few years, and the whole country was in a rancorous mood, exasperated by a series of international events not calculated to pour balm upon the national self-esteem. The attitude of England with regard to Egypt, the “cold douches” administered by Bismarck, the death of Commandant Rivière and the disaster of the Tonkin expedition all contrived to exacerbate a disgruntled public opinion.

It may seem to us that this exasperation manifested itself in puerile and futile ways, but however negligible in themselves these manifestations may have been, they betrayed a deep-rooted disgust which the Government would have been well advised to take into account. Boulangism was fundamentally a protest against corrupt administration, political roguery, and a foreign policy which lowered French prestige. Déroulède's foundation

of the League of Patriots on May 18th 1882 was an emphatic challenge to the ruling power.

But all this passed unperceived by Monsieur Grévy, voluntarily muffled in his cotton wool, through which only dull and garbled rumours made their way. He had not yet heard the rumblings of a riot which was due to break on his own house-top, provoked by the malpractices of his son-in-law Daniel Wilson.

This Daniel Wilson is worth a sketch, for he is one of the most picturesque figures of the time. To us now he seems to bear the authentic hall-mark of the Second Empire, a survival of the great days of Tortoni determined to prolong, under his father-in-law's dull and unspectacular presidency, the life of the boulevards and the dandies.

The amours and extravagancies of his youth had been proverbial. In an era of ostentation he had tried to excel them all. Once he gave a dinner where every lady invited—and there were twelve of them—found a 1,000-franc note (£40 then) in her place with the host's card, inscribed "Money to play with." The gesture was all the more magnificent since Wilson lost continuously that night while the ladies pocketed their money intact.

On another occasion he lost 100,000 francs in one evening's play, a very considerable sum for those days.

With his princely ways and reckless living it was confidently to be expected that Wilson would end up in beggary. But he underwent a complete transformation during the last years of the Second Empire and took up politics with all the neophyte's fervour. He got himself elected as deputy on an historic occasion when all his constituents flocked to Chenonceaux to eat and drink at his expense. After this gargantuan fête, Daniel Wilson made his bow among the representatives of the people, on the Left, by the side of Ernest Picard and Jules Ferry.

His zeal did not stop there. Living in a maze of political combinations and intrigues, this survivor of an older régime began to extend his ramifications into the business world. He became one of the select group of politicians who more or less openly trafficked their votes and seized

whatever opportunities of profit their position brought their way. When in due course he became Grévy's son-in-law this field of activity was enormously increased.

After six glorious and profitable years came the Decorations scandal. It was discovered that a certain staff officer, General Caffarel, had trafficked in the Legion of Honour with the War Office through the agency of a woman named Limouzin.

The house of this woman, a witch-like old creature of revolting appearance, was searched and a number of documents extremely compromising to Daniel Wilson were discovered: letters on the Élysée notepaper, blank commissions, and other undeniable evidence of a scandal of the first magnitude.

Old Grévy heard the rumblings of the storm and vainly tried to dissociate himself from his son-in-law. But public opinion would have none of this. The bitter gibes of Rochefort poured vitriol upon the whole Ministry, pitilessly exposing the extent of the corruption. There was the architect Bachelléry, who had built Wilson's house, the designer of Wilson's famous wrought-iron staircase, the contractor who had supplied the electric bells and light fittings, all decorated with the red ribbon of the Legion by Wilson in lieu of payment. The thing became the topic of the music-halls, and street singers improvised ballads on the misfortunes of M. Grévy:

Oh, how unlucky. Oh, how unlucky!

Why did I ever have a son-in-law?

"Ten centimes, monsieur. —The very latest song. Only ten centimes."

Despite the efforts of the President of the Chamber and the Minister of Justice, the Chamber ruled out Wilson's privilege of immunity and flung him and his father-in-law to the wolves.

The distracted Grévy, hounded, imprecated, and involved up to the hilt despite his frantic denials, could not yet be brought to realize that his resignation was imperative. It took a mob, howling outside his windows day and night, to bring it home to him. At length he did resign, on December 2nd 1887.

This was a critical point in the history of the Republic. Once again the mob had shown itself the determining factor. Crowds that would not disperse hung around the streets, snatching at newspapers, while, inside the Chamber, Boulangists and anti-Boulangists were hurling fiery speeches across the floor.

When it was rumoured that Jules Ferry, variously known as "the man of Tonkin"<sup>1</sup> and "Bismarck's friend", had been nominated in succession to Grévy, public tension was at breaking point. The Municipal Council of Paris declared itself permanent, in view of the gravity of the situation, and people wondered if they were not approaching another Commune.

Finally the fateful day dawned. Parliamentary intrigues had been carried on unceasingly for fifty hours, with the result that an outsider won.

It was Clemenceau who had clinched the matter.

"Let us choose Carnot," he said. "He's the stupidest."

And so honest Sadi Carnot became President of the French, with Boulangism raging triumphantly through Paris.

. . . . .

If there was ever a preposterous interlude in the history of a nation it is this Boulangism, a gay and irresponsible *entr'acte* staged, as it were, between two depressing Parliamentary sessions. It was a gallant adventure—"gallant" in both senses of the word. Two years saw the emergence of General Boulanger from obscurity into the full blaze of his country's adulation, and then back into oblivion.

It is no use looking at him except through the eyes of a woman. No other vision could ever descry the nature of his appeal and his popularity. The novelist Alberic Cahuet has realized this perfectly and has recaptured the essence of the Boulangist adventure better than any political historian.

<sup>1</sup> Jules Ferry incurred great hostility by his colonial expansion policy, which was also applauded by Bismarck on the grounds that France would wear out her energies in the desert and be powerless in Europe. The ill-fated and mismanaged Tonkin expedition was initiated by Ferry.

"There was at this particular moment" (says he) "a sort of divorce, or rather a sentimental separation, between the French people and the Republican régime. It was that grey and weary hour when the bored imagination yearns for the stimulus of adventure, that insidious half-light when desire turns towards a concrete lover. And the lover appeared in a sudden flash of revelation, armed with that vigour, that will to power, and that imperious tenderness which subdue the simple and the subtle alike. After that famous review of the 14th of July, when he appeared as a possible Caesar to crush the corrupt and trembling dotards of the senate, Boulanger had gained a thousand hearts. . . .

"At the beginning of 1889 there was not a factory girl who did not have a picture of the hero in her garret, and not a woman of society who did not yearn to entice into her *salon* this man about whom mystery hung like a voluptuous incense. To wear the red carnation was to feel all the excitement of an amorous intrigue, to feel oneself set apart by the man who had stormed all hearts."

Every one was affected similarly and at once, young and old, male and female together.

But how did it all begin? Nobody knows exactly. It may have been with the reforms that the General desired to introduce in the Army, but they were nothing very much. Or, perhaps, that gesture of painting the sentry-boxes with the national tricolour? But that was still less. Or that frontier incident, the Schnaebel affair? Anyhow, even before becoming War Minister in 1887 he was there, the idol of the crowd, adulated and adored everywhere. His bearing, his handsome face, the legend that was already growing up round him marked out *le brav' Général* as the chosen one to all those who were disgusted with the discreditable Grévy régime.

No man ever understood the art of pleasing better than Boulanger. With the humble and the great alike he was frank, pleasant, and unaffected. His handshake was firm and reassuring. Everybody who came in contact with him was charmed.

He had also an invincible faith in his star, and he never hesitated to proclaim it. "I have always succeeded and I always shall," he would say oracularly, and his listeners, under the influence, would assent.

It is a solid fact that before his youthful *bravura* Left and Right alike were ready to bow. At the very beginning he could claim to unite in his support antagonists as formidable as Clemenceau and Déroulède. Crowds gathered to cheer him whenever he went out; his portrait sold like wildfire, and the legend grew and grew. It was inevitably assisted by the café concerts, and most particularly by Paulus and his famous song.

That song was just another instance of Boulanger's luck. When Garnier and Delormal got the idea of the song and had arranged for Paulus to sing it they could get no further than the title, *En revenant de la revue*.

They tried out three versions with three different heroes. The first was:

Je venais acclamer  
Le brav' Général Boulanger . . .

and the second:

Je venais acclamer  
Le brav' Général Negrier . . .

and the third:

Je venais admirer  
Le brav' Commandant Dominé . . .

"You choose," said they to Paulus.

"I'll stick to Boulanger; he's the most popular," said the singer, and so the famous song was launched. In less than two months it was to carry the name of Boulanger in triumph over the leafy arbours of the Alcazar d'Été to the remotest corners of France.

"*Vive Boulanger!*" cried the audience as they shouted the chorus.

"*Vive Boulanger!*" The cry was carried along by the listeners outside under the chestnut trees. It was carried a long way off, growing as it travelled.

In 1887 he became Minister of War. His luck was holding good. In a famous speech Bismarck unloosed his



“EN REVENANT DE LA REVUE”

The comedian Paulus (in the centre) with a group of the artists at the finale of his famous song. The mounted figure in the background represents General Boulanger





thunders against the French general who typified the idea of a *revanche* and who was thought to be aiming at a military dictatorship. Two months later came the Schnaebel affair.

The tocsin had sounded. A French officer caught in a trap by the Germans, molested, and imprisoned—a grave frontier incident; what would come out of it? The whole of France turned its eyes, not on Goblet, the President of the Council, but on the Minister of War, who was felt to be the man of destiny. The handsome blond general held in his hands the keys of war and peace.

“He will not give way,” said the women proudly.

The graveyards where your heroes lie,  
Quickened as they hear that cry,  
Boulangier!

This is the kind of thing the café concerts rang with.  
And this:

By our country's flowing blood,  
By our past and by our dead,  
Stand firm with the Tsar, for France, for God,  
Death to the Prussians, and long live Boulangier!

However much the uneasy politicians would have liked to rid themselves of him they did not dare. In the end it was the Ministry itself that fell, and the Minister of War, once again a simple general, was sent to command an Army corps at Clermont Ferrand. Feverish excitement in Paris: crowds singing beneath the windows of the Hôtel du Louvre where the hero lived, “He shall not go!” “He shall not go!”

On a hot July day, however, he decided that he must go, and the whole town made up its mind to see him off. As he stepped into his carriage, cheers and Boulangist songs split the heavens; thousands of supporters of both sexes, all wearing the red carnation, set out for the Gare de Lyon to see him depart.

What a day that was for Paris, and how typical of the whole affair!

Since it could not get anywhere near the station, the

General's carriage had to make a detour, but it was intercepted and seized by vigorous hands. "Shall he go?" "He shall not go." The station was besieged; the train was held up; the crowd had taken the matter in its hand and was determined to prevent the departure of its hero.

"All the same I must go!" cried Boulanger, and he sprang on to the engine, which shrieked farewell and made off at full speed.

And all the little shop-girls, the clerks, and the pastry-cooks linked arms and sang in chorus under the unromantic dirty glass roof of the Gare de Lyon:

Don't be downhearted,  
He'll come back again.

He did, indeed, come back, after innumerable adventures, escapes, disguises in blue spectacles and all the apparatus of conspiracy in which he took a childish delight.

And he had a love-affair, of course. How could he have avoided it? He could have had any woman he wanted, but his heart was irrevocably given already.

She was a *Baronne de Bonnemain*, née Laurence Rouzet. Her father was a naval officer, her sister married an artillery officer who subsequently got his command, and she herself had married into a military family. It was not, however, a successful marriage. She was flighty, and social success rapidly turned her head; he was of the same disposition and did nothing whatever to steer the matrimonial ship off the rocks. It inevitably foundered, and there were applications for divorce.

The husband's lapses were admitted, even notorious, and the suit went against him. General Bonnemain himself gave evidence in favour of his daughter-in-law. The husband disappeared from Parisian society and Madame de Bonnemain was free.

For some time she was content to lead an impeccable life of middle-class respectability. Then her health obliged her to frequent watering-places, and soon she became drawn into the vivacious, flirtatious (the word had already

come in) life which prevails in these resorts. But with all her expansiveness and gaiety she retained an inner core of melancholy, as though foreshadowing even then her tragic end.

Since nothing in particular had been said about her, her relatives took her up again, and it was in the house of her brother-in-law, Rozat de Mande, that she first met General Boulanger.

He had been in her mind for some time previously. When her sister, Madame Rozat de Mande, wrote to her in Cannes eulogizing the charm of the General and the high hopes which France reposed in him, Madame de Bonnemain replied eagerly:

"Tell me all about the General. He interests me enormously."

A little while later Madame Rozat de Mande was giving a small dinner-party for Boulanger, when her sister, who had only that very morning returned from Cannes to Paris, invited herself for the occasion.

"It only means laying an extra place," she said.

Madame de Mande, a little surprised at such eagerness and remembering her sister's enthusiasm about the General, was a little wary.

"Well, don't dress too magnificently. It is only an informal little dinner among ourselves."

We may be quite sure that this advice was disregarded and that Madame de Bonnemain gave the General ample opportunities to admire her beautiful shoulders.

A few days later they met again, then the next day, and all the days following. A great mutual passion had sprung into life.

There was no ulterior motive in her love, nothing but the deepest and most disinterested affection. She had no political ambition and insisted from the outset that they must preserve the utmost secrecy. It was in every way a wise move, for it invested her with that aura of mystery which her lover could never resist. She was to be the mistress whom he cherished in secret, the faithful companion remaining ever in the shadow. Between the sessions of the Chamber or in the intervals of party

conferences he would glide round to the rue du Berri and sometimes stay through the night.

None will ever know how many political opportunities he thus missed. During the Rouvier-Ferron Ministry—"the German Ministry", as Rochefort called it<sup>1</sup>—when the town was rife with rumour and wire-pullers ran hither and thither while crowds demonstrated in the streets, Rouvier and his friends would have been terrified had it not been for the arrival of a reassuring little note from the police. It said:

"General Boulanger has just gone to Havre with a lady."

On that 27th of January, when the whole of Paris was waiting for a signal from the man it had chosen, the hero of the hour had no thoughts but for his mistress. For her sake, too, he slipped away in ludicrous disguises from Clermont-Ferrand, and when he returned once more to civil life he was daily at her house.

At this time Madame de Bonnemain had hopes of becoming his wife, for since Madame Boulanger, who was very devout, would not consent to a divorce, the General had applied to Rome for an annulment of his marriage. Even now, however, only a few select friends were in possession of the secret, and it was not until the duel with Floquet that Madame de Bonnemain came out into the open, accompanying the wounded man first to the Villa Dillon, and afterwards installing herself at his bedside in his house in the rue Dumont d'Urville.

Boulanger no longer hesitated. The Roman Rota having declined to declare his marriage void, he applied for a civil divorce. But once again his hopes foundered. When he made the customary declaration before the judge: "Madame Boulanger declines to resume the conjugal state", his wife simply said: "Give me your arm, monsieur, and let us go back."

Madame de Bonnemain suffered deeply from this reverse. From that time onwards her passion took a more sombre tinge. She regarded the Royalist party, who had

<sup>1</sup> Rouvier was the Premier who dismissed Boulanger and put Ferron in his place. He had been implicated in several scandals and was finally discredited by the Panama revelations (see pp. 114 *et seq.*).

been making advances to the General recently, as mainly responsible for the fact that the divorce was not implemented, and she conceived an immense hatred for them and for all the other interests who battled round her idol. Even exile, with all its bitterness and regret, seemed to her preferable to the life they had to lead in Paris. One idea outgrew all others in her mind, to fly away as far as possible—with him.

But whatever might be the General's secret life in the shadows he did not deny himself the applause of the crowd by day. In a few months he had become one of the forces which France had to reckon with. What was he going to make of it? What party, what orientation, would he choose to further his ends?

His female admirers made light of this question, whatever their own political complexion. They loved him just as he was. But public opinion was coming round to realize the harsh truth that the General himself had no more precise ideas than his supporters. He said, and repeated, that it was necessary to revise the Constitution, to put an end to all the administrative scandals, to reorganize the parliamentary machine, to reconstruct the national order, and to keep its sword tempered. He went on saying all these things, but he did not go any further. He was content to wait on the tide of circumstance.

It was an ironic spectacle, singular and perhaps even unique in our history, this abounding force of youth and confidence and the wary and circumspect men who walked round him, trying him out and waiting the moment to fall on him as a naturalist with his green net bides his time to pounce upon a dazzling butterfly, carelessly lingering for honey. First of all the Republicans had seen in him the devoted soldier who would serve their most urgent ends. Clemenceau was to the fore among these. "I will make him War Minister," he had said.

He had done so. Boulanger became Clemenceau's man and was lauded by him to the skies. But our General was far too hospitable to keep his doors closed to all but one party, and it did not take men long to find this out. Soon the rumour was all round Paris that Left and

Right were equally welcome in the house in the rue St. Dominique.

There were preliminary roars from Clemenceau. And there was glacial fury from Rochefort, who wrote a scathing article against Boulanger in *L'Intransigeant*. The Boulangists were in despair. Something would have to be done quickly. Laguerre was the man chosen to do it, together with that young, active, and very resolute Comte Dillon who was already making himself the Morny of the period. They were delegated to try to get round Rochefort, and they knew it would not be at all easy; for he was formidable, this nervous, furious, stubborn man with his pock-marked face, like another Mirabeau, and the huge domed brow like Victor Hugo's. His thin, satanic beard, the celebrated elf-lock, and the rapier blue eyes expressed a personality essentially autocratic despite the democracy he had so signally professed. He loved to play with men and ideas like a showman working the strings of his puppets, and nobody doubted that, should they displease him, he was perfectly capable of smashing them all. At this period, luckily for the negotiators, he was too disgusted with parliamentarianism to do anything else but rally round Boulanger, and Laguerre was thus able to make things right with him. A reconciliation lunch was arranged; it went off admirably, and from that time on Rochefort was an undeviating partisan of the General.

The fall of Goblet's Cabinet was very serious for the Radicals. Clemenceau lost his beautiful soldier, and made desperate efforts to retain him, aided, of course, by the Parisian crowd, who demonstrated in the streets crying "We want Boulanger!"

When Clemenceau heard that General Ferron was to succeed his nominee as War Minister he made overtures to him in order to induce him to refuse the portfolio. But Ferron preferred a Ministry in hand to whatever Clemenceau might have in the bush, and he took office. Clemenceau was naturally more furious than ever. When the new Minister, meeting him in the Chamber, approached him with outstretched hand, the director of *Justice* put his own in his pocket.

"I don't know you," he said.

That was Clemenceau's way of looking after his creatures. But if he was a partisan he was not afraid to change sides. Three months later Madame de Bonne-main's lover had fallen from his esteem; six months later he was his mortal enemy.

Boulanger's Republican days were over. When he left Paris to resume his military command he was to be thrown into another camp.

The new orientation was the Bonaparte Revisionist party, and the man of the moment there was Georges Thiébaud. This was a young provincial journalist of parts who had arrived in Paris from Mezières with the idea of substituting for the Bonapartist party pure and simple a party from which the hereditary principle should be excluded. France, said he, needed not so much a monarchy as a strong authority centred in the head of the State, and only the principle of free election could give any man such supreme authority. And who was so likely to be elected by universal suffrage, in the year 1886-7, as the man with whom the whole nation had fallen in love?

Georges Thiébaud got in touch with Boulanger and unfolded his ideas. The General, as usual, neither agreed nor disagreed, but he seemed to be very much interested. At the bottom of his heart his chief concern was how he could manage to get to Royat to see Madame de Bonne-main more frequently, but it was difficult to refuse this enthusiastic young journalist, who wished to accompany him to see Prince Jerome at Prangins. The fact that he consented to meet one of the claimants to power seemed to argue that he had no desire for any other role but that of General Monk. But who can tell what he thought?

The more it is considered, however, the more incredibly foolish does this adventure seem. He was a general on the active list, and he was going to leave his command secretly, without permission, and in disguise, to confer in a foreign town with the head of a deposed dynasty. But it was not undertaken in any light or frivolous spirit; this secret imbroglio was just the kind of thing to exercise an irresistible attraction for his romantic soul.

So they set out, followed by the police, of course. But they managed to give the latter the slip at Lyons, and Boulanger, passing over the frontier as "Commandant Solar", burst in on the astonished Prince Jerome, who for fully fifteen minutes refused to be convinced of his visitor's identity, so incredible it seemed to him that such a man should take part in such an adventure.

The situation, however, was explained. They exchanged ideas on politics, domestic and foreign, and found that they held similar views on almost everything. They had no quarrel with the Republic, which was to remain the official régime, but with a new Constitution. For the rest, the Prince said that he had no intention of offering himself as a candidate. Boulanger said that neither had he. They seem to have played the game perfectly.

They got up and went into a room where the historic relics of the Bonapartes were displayed in a glass case.

The Prince showed several of them to his guest, and then, indicating an Egyptian sabre which was inscribed "The Sword used by the First Consul at Marengo", he said:

"Isn't that a precious souvenir?"

The General professed great astonishment.

"Are you sure that it is really the actual sword?"

The Prince laughed. "Do I look like a collector of bogus antiques?"

"Then it is indeed a precious souvenir," responded the General in a tone of admiration and respect.

The Prince Napoleon touched him on the shoulder.

"Yes, General, that is the First Consul's sword. And when you have won back Alsace-Lorraine for France I will give it to you!"

They parted in mutual appreciation, and Boulanger went back to Clermont with the same imprudent simplicity.

But if these men imagined they had succeeded in catching the elusive hero, they were gravely deceived. It was they in fact who had been captured by him: so much so that when they heard that the Royalists were taking a hand in the butterfly snaring game they were quite ready to compete for him.



They had no money to offer him, but they could give their loyalty. And they remained in fact his most faithful bodyguard to the end.

After his flirtations with the Republicans and the Revisionists, Boulanger found himself approached by the Royalists, correct, formal men with grandiloquent manners and slightly mysterious airs. Their chief representative, Monsieur de Martimprey, deputy for a northern department, had been formerly a Bonapartist but had rallied to the Royalist camp after the death of the Prince Imperial. It was just after Grévy's resignation, when the whole country was agitated by the rumour that Jules Ferry was being nominated to the presidency, and despite his predisposition against the idol of the mob, M. de Martimprey thought that the time had come when an understanding with the General was imperative. So a secret interview was arranged, with de Martimprey and his colleagues Le Herisse and de Mackau, at the former's house in the rue de Monceau.

"The house has two exits," said M. de Martimprey.

That was quite enough to draw Boulanger. On a dark night in November 1887 they forgathered secretly, shrouded in long, dark cloaks, invisible against the dusky walls. De Martimprey and the Baron de Mackau waxed eloquent, appealing to the patriotism of the General and showing him a letter from the Comte de Paris approving in advance anything his faithful lieutenants might see fit to do. It was necessary, they said, to bar out Jules Ferry, and they and Boulanger must form a Ministry. The General could then make way for the monarchy. Once more, it was the role of Monk that was offered to him. Of course he said neither yea nor nay, beyond promising to intervene at once against Ferry.

Their plans were discomfited by the fact that Ferry was not nominated at all. Sadi Carnot, as we know, became President, and no portfolio was offered to Boulanger. Nevertheless, de Martimprey and de Mackau considered that they had accomplished their first step.

So well had the secret been kept that the Royalist Press had no inkling of it and continued to cover the name of

Boulanger with mud. "Rocheport's friend" and "Clemenceau's creature" were some of the epithets bestowed on him, while in private Gallifret raged against "the Saint-Arnaud of the café concerts".

"Naturally I loathe him," said he. "He is everything that I should like to be."

But another personage was to come upon the scene, to enable the Royalist party openly to proclaim its new recruit. This was Arthur Meyer.

With his tall hat stuck on his head, his pepper-and-salt coloured whiskers, his face pale as wax with black eyes that stared blankly through you, he had imposed himself upon everybody. His ideas were rather circumscribed. He wanted to put Philippe VII on the throne regardless of the etiquette of preparation, whether as King, Emperor, or President of the Republic. For him the reality counted for more than the form, and as he watched the growing popularity of Boulanger he too had made the invariable decision: "There's our man."

As an intimate friend both of the Duchesse d'Uzès and Comte Dillon he was very well placed to carry out such an undertaking, but he was determined to insinuate himself in the centre of things as well. He had the supreme ability of discretion; he knew how to live in apparent obscurity, to avoid compromising situations, and to appear in no other role but that of the assiduous go-between of the Comte de Paris and the Boulangist party. He played his part so well that when he chose to liquidate the business, his "Good night" was the epitaph of the adventure.

It was throughout an extraordinary affair.

"The General was only a card to the Royalist party. And the Royalist party meant nothing but funds to the General. Both sides held something in reserve all the time. The General needed the Royalists, for without their money he had no resources, but he heartily wished to be rid of them. They needed him, but were at the same time afraid. The sword which they proposed to unsheathe against the Republic might very well be turned against themselves.



GENERAL BOULANGER

*From a photograph in the Rischgitz Collection*



"The Comte de Paris and his friends had been very skilful in cornering the General, and in subordinating to their interest the man who had gained his first popularity by expelling the royal princes from the Army. But General Boulanger had been even more skilful, for they got nothing out of him but promises and aspirations. He might receive money or service from others, but the only currency in which he ever paid was that of illusion. So the affair petered out in deception allround."

The Royalists did, in fact, bring Boulanger something that neither the Republicans nor the Bonapartists had offered. They, or rather the Duchesse d'Uzès, for it was she who almost alone supplied it, had a war-chest.

In the beginning she had only been asked for small subsidies, election expenses here and there. But once put a finger on the steering-wheel and the whole hand is drawn on, and the Duchess abandoned herself joyously. Boulanger had no more fervent admirer.

They had first met when he was War Minister, and they had had a long talk together on the "decadence of France" and the necessity of devising a new form of government.

"Why can't we do it together?" she had said laughing, and he had not said "No."

So when Comte Dillon and Arthur Meyer came to ask her for further financial help she unhesitatingly put three millions at their disposal. The money was given absolutely, spontaneously and without any reserves as a declaration of faith in the General.

"I answer for him," she said, "as I would for myself. To doubt him would be to doubt myself."

And thus she remained till the end, a gallant friend and a loyal ally.

To introduce "her" General to the aristocratic remnant she arranged a magnificent dinner-party, whose twenty-four guests included the Comte d'Harcourt, the Duc de la Rochefoucauld, the Marquis de Breteuil, and other bearers of honoured and distinguished names. With, of course, Comte Dillon and Arthur Meyer.

The Duchesse d'Uzès wore the red carnation. And on her menus were inscribed, not the names of the dishes but the titles of the fanfares with which each course was heralded.

The dinner was followed by a reception at nine o'clock, at which the whole of Royalist society and sympathizers fongathered. Then followed for Boulanger a period of feasting and adulation such as man can seldom have experienced before. He lived in a whirl of beautiful and adoring women all wearing red carnations. His social triumph was complete.

With Arthur Meyer and his war-chest working full-time, his general popularity was not less so. No single factor which might glorify or expand the Boulangist legend was neglected. Thousands of photographs of the General were published and sold at the extremely low price of three centimes. Over three millions of these are said to have been distributed in one year.

The songs were free publicity, but they brought in plenty of money for their authors. Paulus is said to have made over fifty thousand francs with *En r'venant de la revue*. Some of these songs have already been quoted here, and there is an anonymous little book, entitled *Coulisses du Boulangisme* in which the curious may find further specimens. Handkerchiefs, ties, scarves, chocolate boxes, pipes, vases, plates, and every conceivable object which could be decorated either with the General's portrait or the red carnation were sold by the thousand, not only in Paris but in every provincial city. All this was the work of a supremely thorough and efficient propaganda machine, well oiled with funds.

Wherever there was to be an election, crowds of Boulangist supporters were dispatched in advance. They awaited their candidate's arrival at the station, received him with a burst of cheers, attended all his meetings, applauded his every word, and in short, did every conceivable thing to engender that curious manifestation known as "spontaneous enthusiasm".

But beneath all this hysterical and not always disinterested activity, and among this horde of subsidized

supporters, it is only fair to add that there were many people who would sincerely have given anything for the cause. The great reservoir of these was Déroulède's League of Patriots, who, following the example of their chief, revered Boulanger first as the brave soldier who had stood up to Germany at the time of the Schnaebel affair, and secondly, as the man whom they could trust to deliver Alsace-Lorraine and to purge corruption from internal politics. Faith, ardour, generosity, and the capacity for self-sacrifice were possessed by these men to an unlimited degree, and they were all at Boulanger's service. But the General mistrusted the use of force and Déroulède was persuaded that without it they could accomplish nothing. Arguments and discussions deepened into quarrels and estrangements. Déroulède was all ardour and combativeness; Boulanger was all compromise. Nothing could be made of his hesitations, his indecisions, his total lack of will to action. An immense weariness and disillusion were all that this hero of a day left behind him.

The end of the story is well known to all: how this hero of popular romance followed out his novelettish tendency to the end and died on his mistress's tomb. What motive more calculated to stir the hearts of the sentimental million, to provide a theme for the songs they sang, on yearning summer nights, in the shadow of the chestnut trees?

On that celebrated Sunday night in January, soft and close as a night in spring, the mob of Paris, quivering with excitement, gathered around beneath the windows of the restaurant where the General was known to be dining. From the moment when he had refused to march on the Élysée his fall had been assured. The gallant adventure was over, and Paris had come to see the last of it. Somewhere on the outskirts of the crowd hovered M. Clement with a warrant for the General's arrest in his pocket, but nobody would have assisted him to execute it. Almost the whole of the police force was Boulangist, as also was the Republican Guard. Probably at least half of the entire garrison of Paris supported the General.

That was a tense minute, fraught with immense possibilities for a Stendhalian man of action. But Boulanger was not a man of action. When his thoughts should have been on the Faubourg St. Honoré they were occupied only with the image of the beloved. He refused to set out upon a mere political adventure; he had already embarked for Cytherea.

Laguerre, watching the minutes tick away on his watch, put it in his pocket and said to the assembly:

"Gentlemen, from this moment Boulangism is no more."

As quickly as he had risen into popularity, so now the General slid down the steep incline. The Government, being perfectly well aware of this, did not attempt to prevent his second and final "flight" on April 1st, but permitted him to cross the frontier with Madame de Bonnemain and settle down in Brussels, where all his comings and goings were reported to them. The woman had finally triumphed over the politicians.

Vainly the latter entreated the General to return. He was deaf to all but one voice now, and that voice was failing. Madame de Bonnemain's health had been growing rapidly worse, and soon afterwards she died and was buried in a cemetery at Brussels. A few days later, on September 30th, 1891, Boulanger returned to her grave and killed himself there.

Visitors to the cemetery will notice perhaps a headstone inscribed simply "Marguerite and Georges." They are the final words of a great love-story.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE 1889 EXHIBITION

THE year 1889 was a year of excitement. Events tumbled over each other in every department of national activity, as though, after ten years of apprenticeship to the tempo of modern life, the nation had at last reached its full stride. As a matter of fact it was only the preliminary quickening of the new rhythm, but it was remarkable because for the first time men could feel beneath their feet the pulsing of the accelerator.

The Universal Exhibition itself, the magnet which drew such unparalleled crowds to the city seemed to exhale an intoxicating vapour which bewitched everything around it. Men were dizzy with excitement; they saw everything at least twice as large as life. Unhappily nobody foresaw the influenza epidemic which, making its appearance for the first time on a national scale, carried off thousands to the grave at the end of the year.

The political arena seethed with agitation and conspiracy. The Boulangist wave was rising to its crescendo, to die down a few months later in agonized spasms which convulsed the political world. Party and personal differences became more and more embittered, and duels of increasing frequency. There were the celebrated meetings of Rochefort and Lissagaray, Raynal and Chiche, Sigismond Lacroix and Georges Laguerre, and scores of others. The High Court declared against the Boulangist Movement, and the League of Patriots was declared illegal and proscribed. All this in an atmosphere of constant excitement, mass meetings and demonstrations in the streets.

Among the new buildings and monuments completed were the new Sorbonne, the Gare Saint Lazare, the Monument of the Republic in the Place de la Nation, the statues of Étienne Dolet and Camille Desmoulins, the Bourse and the Musée Guimet. Lamp standards with electric lamps were installed on the boulevards,

and the children's playground was opened in the Bois de Boulogne.

The year was not even without its augmented quota of illustrious dead. There was the chemist Chevreul, Barbey d'Aurévilly, and Villiers de l'Isle Adam among writers, the painter Dupré, and, most discussed of all, the handsome Jacques Damala, the husband of Sarah Bernhardt.

Since Paris always has to have an Aunt Sally, the caricaturists and the comedians turned their attention to President Carnot, whose harsh wooden features have been transfixed for posterity by Caran d'Ache. The crazes of the moment were Forain's drawings in the *Vie Parisienne*, de Maupassant's novels, Paul Bourget's *Mensonges*, and *Mademoiselle Fauffre*, the first novel of a new writer named Marcel Prevost.

The "professional beauties" of the day were Laure de Chiffreville and Fanny Robert. Emilienne d'Alençon, Polaire, and Liane de Pougy were already being talked about.

The principal topic of discussion in society was the Prince de Sagan, whose extravagancies were still dazzling Paris. The prodigality with which he squandered his wife's millions, the purple and gold livery of his servants, the complete service of one hundred pieces of the finest silverware in Paris, his vast and extravagant stables, his racing stud, his carriages and outriders—all recalled the sumptuous days of the Tuileries and Saint Cloud rather than the cheeseparing régime of M. Grévy.

He was the acknowledged arbiter of Parisian elegance, with his impeccable tail coat, sumptuous tie, and faultless white gloves and waistcoat, while his monocle with its wide *moiré* ribbon has passed into legend. Around him rallied all the growing numbers of the *fin de siècles* and the *petits crevés*, the contemporary bright young people. No social event was complete without his presence, from the Exhibition itself to a first night, an Opéra Ball, "varnishing day" at the *salon*, a lunch at Marguéry's or a race-meeting at Longchamps. He must preside over it, or at least deign to be present at it, for any occasion to obtain the final hall-mark of success. He was more than

a man; he was already a legend: he was as ubiquitous, as Boni de Castellane said maliciously, as the *compère* of a revue.

At the Comédie Française, the elder Coquelin created a scandal by resigning after twenty-seven years, despite the entreaties of his colleagues. After seven months, however, he thought better of it, and his reappearance was, of course, a public occasion.

A skating rink in the old Plaza de Toros in the Rue Pergolèse was a new public amusement. So also were Buffalo Bill and his cowboys, who were gathering all Paris to recapture the thrill of their youthful dreams of Gustave Aimard and Fenimore Cooper. The wide-brimmed cowboy hat was all the rage.

The Opéra, however, profited most from the crowds of provincials and others which the Exhibition drew to the capital. The latest success was the ballet of *Coppélia*, which had broken all previous records. In the foyer might be seen the Prince de Sagan, of course, the Marquis de Breteuil, and all the others who "cultivated" the dancers of the Opéra, who then held a unique position on the margins of smart society. The favourites of the hour were Marie Santaville, a clever mimic, the dusky versatile Invernizzi, Mademoiselle Piron, like the huntress Diana, Julia Subra of the downcast eyes and fabulous lashes, the malicious Rosita Mauri . . . and all the others.

They had the world at their feet in 1889. The great actresses of the legitimate stage had not yet seen fit to enter the Paphian preserves, and the mere professional Cyprians could not compare with them. The dancers of the Opéra reigned over the imagination of men of all ages and all kinds, their images pirouetting in the dreams of the provincials who came from all over France to see and to applaud.

Heaven knows they were simple enough in their tastes, these uncrowned queens of Paris. Rita Sangalli had a little house near the Trocadéro, her drawing-room full of red and gold furniture, the whole presided over by a majestic portrait of her mother. There were albums, embroidery frames, and all the usual accessories of genteel

femininity. Sangalli herself ran the household, kept the accounts rigidly and saw that everybody around her was kept hard at work.

She was extremely proud of being a dancer, a profession which she considered entitled to the greatest respect. When a certain journalist, a little prematurely perhaps, referred to her with that intimacy of address generally reserved for an older profession, the lady was very indignant. She finished up by a most respectable marriage.

Rosita Mauri had a flat in the rue de Provence, where she preserved all the favours, faded bouquets, and other souvenirs which a generous public had bestowed on her. Blanche Righetti had a pretty little country house at Vesinet, but even her ideas of luxury did not soar above an upholstered seat for her mother in the parish church.

But it did not matter, then. Nothing could detract from their glamour, in 1889.

. . . . .

If the Exhibition of 1878 had marked the financial recovery of France, that of 1889 marked her growth and expansion in other fields. But the latter had something beyond its mere size and prodigality to mark it out from its predecessors, something which was borne in upon the least observant or far-seeing. The Exhibition of 1889 marked the establishment of science as predominant among human activities.

The colossal hall, whose dimensions almost frightened the visitors, was a triumphal proclamation of the opening reign of the architecture of steel. A soaring steel tower, said to be the highest in the world, rose on the banks of the Seine. An agglomeration of new and ingenious machinery such as the mind of man had never hitherto thought of, was massed together almost insolently to overawe the wondering crowds.

The remarkable thing was that these manifestations of a new aesthetic and a new technique were mature achievements and not tentative experiments. Whatever dream had moved their originators it had been completely realized in the Engineering Gallery and the Eiffel Tower.



IN THE BOIS, 1887



They marked a revolution in industry, a revolution effected suddenly and without precursors, consolidating itself irremovably despite protests and criticism.

The Eiffel Tower was the subject of a rain of these from the moment it raised its head above the ground. Artists, amateurs of taste and that portion of the general public not susceptible to the hypnotism of mere dimensions, were affronted by this unparalleled architectural innovation.

On February 14th 1887 *Le Temps* published the following, addressed to the Director of the Exhibition:

"The undersigned citizens, being artists, painters, sculptors, architects, and others devoted to and desirous of preserving the amenities of Paris, wish to protest, in the name of our national good taste, against such an erection in the very heart of our city, as the monstrous and useless Eiffel Tower, already christened by the malicious common sense and unperverted good taste of our people generally, 'The Tower of Babel'. . . .

"How much longer is the City of Paris to be a playground for these barbarous and sordid imaginations, which disfigure and dishonour her? For the Eiffel Tower, which even commercially minded America rejected, is a public dishonour to our city. All our historic buildings, our monuments of rare and appealing beauty, are dwarfed and humiliated by this monstrous apotheosis of the factory chimney whose odious shadow will lie over our city like a gigantic and shameful stain.

"To you, sir, who have contributed so much to the beauty of the city we all love, should belong the honour of defending it once more. . . ."

The signatories included Meissonier, Gounod, Sardou, Gerôme, Bonnat, Bouguereau, Alexandre Dumas, François Coppée, Leconte de Lisle, Sully Prud'homme and Guy de Maupassant.

This protest is reprinted here because it expressed perfectly the general feeling of most cultured Frenchmen at the time. It serves also as a testimonial to the tenacity of Eiffel and his collaborators in pushing on with their work

in the teeth of so much opposition. And it demonstrates, not for the first or last time, the difficulty which even great artists experience in judging an attempt outside the range of their own aesthetic conventions.

In spite of the newspaper campaign and the pressure brought to bear upon the public authorities, the work went on. Edward Lockroy, the Minister of Commerce, besought M. Alphand not to reply to the protest but to preserve it, for, said he: "Such an eloquent example of French prose, ornamented by so many distinguished names, ought to be shown in a glass case at the Exhibition itself. It could not fail to attract the crowd. Some of them might even read it."

By the end of March 1888 the Eiffel Tower was completed. The occasion was celebrated in a fête to the workpeople, held in the Champ de Mars.

"At 2.35" (writes the *Petit Parisien*) "M. Eiffel, who was visibly very much affected, drew the cord which unveiled the monument, finished at last. Immediately there burst out a salvo of twenty-one salutes which were loudly applauded by the crowd below. On the lowest stage were installed tables where the three hundred-odd workmen, still in their working clothes, drank champagne in celebration of the fruition of their work."

The Eiffel Tower was the keystone of the Exhibition. The universal publicity which it received surprised even the organizers. It was the newest wonder of the world, and the world flocked to see it. Its far-flung shadow made patterns in the gardens planted about its feet, and its ingenious intricacies and curious grace ended by fascinating the most prejudiced. People began to grow aware that they were in the presence of a new aesthetic conception.

The great mass of the visitors, however, thought only about one thing—getting up to the summit. Crowds tramped up the stairs and besieged the lifts. On the first stage were show-cases which various enterprising firms had installed for the display of their merchandise, and



also a café and a restaurant. On the second stage *Figaro* had installed a printing plant, and visitors could sign their names, with appropriate sentiments, in the special "Golden Book of the Tower".

It may be imagined that this "Golden Book" contained a choice collection of inanities. Here are a few of them:

"When I look at the Eiffel Tower, I am proud of being a Frenchman."—L. Dutt, Saint Galmier.

"I have made a solemn vow that my first granddaughter shall be called Eiffeline."—G. Gregory, Bordeaux.

"Where will French genius soar to in 1989?"—Pereida de Monterro, Brazil.

Elzear Rugier of Marseilles burst into verse:

But the true Marseillais as he looks down in awe,  
At the dazzling splendour beneath him unrolled,  
Regrets that he can't see his Cannebière!

Edmond de Goncourt, who detested the Eiffel Tower ("can any one imagine anything more outrageous to the eye of an old man of taste"), nevertheless condescended to go up it, to dine on a beautiful July evening with Charpentier, Hermant, Zola, and Dayot.

"The lift in motion feels something like a ship getting under way, but fortunately it doesn't make you seasick. From the top you can see, farther than you could ever have thought, the extent, the magnificence, the Babylonian immensity of Paris. Under the setting sun the angles of the masonry catch up colour, and the sweeping lines of the horizon closing down upon the slope of Montmartre make the town look, as the light slowly fades, like a vast illuminated ruin.

"We were rather thoughtful at dinner. . . . Then came the descent, which we made on foot, our heads seeming far away in the upper air, and our feet plunging into illimitable space with each step. Like ants creeping along the ropes of a gigantic ship, but the ropes are of iron."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Edmond de Goncourt: *Journal*.

After the dinner on the Tower they visited the attractions of the Exhibition. The most popular of these was the reproduction of a street in Cairo in its true Oriental fecundity.

"All the lascivious curiosity of Paris" (said de Goncourt) "converges there at night to watch the huge Africans with their naïve obscene gestures, the swarming population like cats parading on the tiles. . . . With its acrid smell and stinging heat the rue de Cairo might very well be called the rue de Rut."

Strings of little white donkeys, so young and small that they seemed to have just escaped from the manger, jostled the passers by, whose ears were continuously assaulted by the sharp wails of the flutes and the thud of the cymbals from the groups of native musicians squatting on the ground, There was real Turkish coffee to be had, served by Arabs, and there were innumerable touts issuing invitations to see a *danse du ventre*.

"But beauty is far removed from all this" (writes Gustave Guichet). "To find it you must go to the little theatre where strange music announces that the Javanese dancers are about to perform.

"One by one they come out of the canopied temple-tent, clad in straight tunics and crowned with towering head-dresses of gold. They are the colour of saffron, and exhale odours of spice; their long, veiled eyes slant upwards; their bodies are almost emaciated and their breasts are meagre and frail. With their arms and ankles weighted down with bracelets they defile in procession before you with the solemn modesty of adolescent priestesses vowed to the mysterious and voluptuous divinity of their art.

"They go back to the Temple. Then suddenly, to the music of those wood and string instruments which sound like the wind whistling through keyholes, the bubbling of cauldrons, and the gurgling of water into bowls, they come out and dance.

"It is a frieze of youthful bodies offered in prayer.

They approach each other with stiff, hieratic movements, their arms taut from their bodies, the hands flat from the wrists. Their eyes stare blankly ahead as their files approach and mingle. All their gestures signify their utter obeisance before their Divinity.

"The dance changes. It grows faster and wilder, a witch's sabbath in a strange forgotten land. The gold of their head-dresses rattles and the chains fly out and glitter like marsh lights over a bewitched morass. Their bodies are tense and quivering as they leap and circle in the air. . . ."<sup>1</sup>

The Javanese dancers set a fashion for exotic dances which lasted the Paris music-halls for about twenty years. A few dyspeptic veterans urged a return to "our national dances, set aside" (as one of them wrote to the *Petit Journal*) "for these contortions which have nothing even human in them". Edmond de Goncourt also, who seems to have been in a jaundiced mood that year, protests against these gross dances executed by "females with skins like coarse flannel, shining loathsomely with grease like rats fed on eels from the sewers".<sup>2</sup>

Other attractions were the *czigane* orchestras, with their crimson waistcoats, glittering eyes, and black hair, their despairing looks and nimble fingers. They discoursed walses and *czardas* to an animated audience of pretty women with tight-laced waists. That summer it was fashionable to wear printed floral fabrics, and some of the more dashing had begun to puff out their shoulders into what were afterwards going to be known as "leg of mutton sleeves". They gave themselves up whole-heartedly to this seductive music, in which their ardent imaginations could hear the gallop of horsemen, the cries of their beasts, and the death moans of their strangled mistresses. It was an appetite which was to be glutted in the years to come. From 1889 the *czigane* orchestras reigned supreme in Paris restaurants and cabarets down to 1914 when they were ousted by negro jazz-bands.

It had undeniable charm, that Exhibition of 1889. It

<sup>1</sup> Gustave Guiches: *Le Banquet*.

<sup>2</sup> Edmond de Goncourt: *Journal*.

had not yet grown to such immoderate dimensions as later on, in 1900; one could still, despite the crowds, find oneself alone under the beautiful night sky across which the illuminations of twenty "palaces" streamed like a flowing river of light.

From six o'clock onwards the immense crowds assembled in the Champ de Mars to wait for the illuminated fountains, which did not begin to flow until eleven. These formed an attraction which has not palled even now, and then they were a fascinating scientific novelty, enchanting the crowd and the *cognoscenti* alike.

When night had completely fallen over the scene, luminous jets would start out suddenly from the base of the Eiffel Tower. Azure, gold, scarlet and emerald—all the hues of the prism seemed to battle to defeat the blackness which surrounded them. Gradually their colours would lessen in intensity: purple changed into delicate mauve, the glittering gold grew paler, the emerald softened to a lighter green. Colours were born and died, blurred and drifted into clouds, faded, and then shot out again in their pristine brilliance. Yes, those were nights to dream of.

The dream would have been more enduring, however, had it not been spoilt by the appalling epidemic which burst over Paris when the Exhibition ended, like a time-fuse bomb which it had left behind.

At first it had seemed quite a well-behaved epidemic. Dr. Brouardel, deputed to investigate it by the public authority, reported that the disorder was trifling and that a few days at home by the fire was all the treatment it required.

This was complacently published in the newspapers and became a standing joke. "Have you got it?" "Not yet?" "Well, you will, because we've all got to have it."

In the cabarets they were singing:

Everybody's got the influe-en-za-ah!

But they soon began to find out that it was not a joke. The death-roll began to mount alarmingly and the people got into a state of panic. It was useless for the Press to

publish reassuring statements; their own obituary columns gave them the lie. Public services became disorganized, theatres closed, fêtes were put off, and law sittings suspended. Under this cloud of panic and depression the year 1889 passed out. And the winter following was not calculated to reassure anybody.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE PANAMA AFFAIR

THE Panama affair cannot be neglected in an account of French social life under the Third Republic for all that it was a trifle compared with such an event as the Dreyfus case, which convulsed the country from end to end and had almost incalculable repercussions.

Nevertheless the Panama affair was something more than a mere financial crash. It not only ruined thousands of poor investors, which in itself always has a disquieting effect upon social conditions; it unveiled a state of affairs in the political world which could not fail to arouse utmost public concern, and to give a head to a great deal of gathering discontent.

Seen from the vantage-point of distance to-day, it seems a sordid and commonplace scandal enough. We may even be inclined to wonder why the Baron de Reinach should have killed himself for so little. They order these things better now.

But it must not be forgotten that the close connection between finance and politics which the affair revealed came as a great shock then to an unsuspecting public, and the machinations and intrigues of both parties, suddenly disclosed in all their shabbiness and sinuosity, were a brutal proclamation that the old line of demarcation credited and cherished, at least in theory, for generations, did not in fact exist at all. The plain man had clung to this ideal distinction, and the sudden revelation that the nation's elected could not be dissociated from the sordid traffickings of finance filled him with indignation, panic, and disgust.

We have already stressed the fact that one of the characteristics of the new society which had come into being after the fall of Marshal MacMahon was a hard and uncompromising realism. The Panama affair was simply the financial manifestation of this spirit, just as much as the triumph of naturalism in letters, the transformation of

the Press and the strident dominance of the mechanical as typified in the Gallery of Machinery and the Eiffel Tower.

The men of the day did not sense the profundity of this revolution of ideals and manners. But nobody who had the interest of his country at heart should have tolerated the possibility of dragging down de Lessep's great enterprise to the sordid level of parliamentary jobbery. The only question that mattered was not that of pillorying fifty or more deputies, however richly they deserved it; it was the completion of the work itself, at whatever cost and whatever sacrifice. A genuinely realistic public opinion would have seen that the greater culprits were not the Reinachs, the Baihauts and the Rouviers, but the Government which permitted the enterprise to fall through.

But at the time it was only the scandalous aspect which concerned people. The affair became a political battleground upon which all the party hatreds and private jealousies could be let loose. Men abused, vilified, and even assaulted their opponents, but they would not look farther afield. It was a purely party struggle, and it did not occur to any of the participants or spectators to regard it as a national affair.

There was, of course, plenty of sympathy for the actual sufferers, and at first the sight of the pathetic groups of small investors clamouring hysterically in the streets for their money back aroused a genuine and not ignoble concern. Not for long, however. Everybody knows that life is like that; the sheep are always there to be shorn and the pity which they may arouse soon lapses into indifference. How many historians, writing of the war of 1914 to 1918, waste ten lines commiserating the holders of Russian securities?

The streets of Paris, that historic stage of so much that has changed the face of France, did not witness the most agitated scenes of the Panama affair. The ordinary man and woman, who had played so large a part in the Boulangist adventure, took here no part at all. It was not, like the Dreyfus case, to excite feeling over a whole generation and to set anarchic ideas churning in thousands

of heads that did not even suspect the influence. It was essentially a family quarrel, the great parliamentary family ranged against fifty erring deputies. It was even less than that, for it all took place in one parliamentary session prolonged over several weeks. Maurice Barrès, who in *Leurs Figures*, has written the classic book on the subject, has found the exact title for it—*Une journée parlementaire*. But, what a day!

It is not within our province here to detail all the events of that day, but, in trying to fix on the significant points of the drama and to assess their influence on opinion, we must run an eye over the protagonists, these politicians who found the floor of the Chamber transformed into an arena with themselves as either matadors or bulls. It was a fight to the death too, with a furious audience to see to that.

The bulls were not very tame, either.

There was Théodore Rouvier,<sup>1</sup> broad-shouldered and muscular, his face betraying the Levantine blood common among the cosmopolitan inhabitants of Marseilles. He was born for excitement, and he lived quite naturally at fever heat. The vulgarity of his appearance and manners was for a long time considered to detract from his chances of political success, but his marriage to the charming Claude Vignon refined him appreciably and his Southern fluency of speech enabled him to impose himself upon the Chamber. He knew how to hold an audience.

His antagonism to Boulangism had made him many enemies in the Parliament of 1892, which still retained a strong body of the General's adherents. As soon as the first rumblings of the storm broke, and Rouvier, knowing that he was implicated, got up to defend himself, howls of execration from massed groups greeted him all round.

By the side of this roaring bull, always ready to charge his adversaries, the elegant figure of Emmanuel Arène seemed more slender and graceful still. Arène showed scarcely a trace of his Corsican origin. He had become the complete Parisian, the impenitent cynic who would turn a phrase at the foot of the guillotine. When Rouvier, beaten to his knees like the bull he resembled, almost

<sup>1</sup> Premier 1877. Minister of Finance 1887, 1889-92.



collapsed before his enemies, Arène, gracefully bowing to the assembled newspaper men, remarked, with regard to the famous "List of the Proscribed":

"Well, for once in my life I'm certain of a Ministerial recommendation!"

When Rouvier came to him bewailing his lot, "It's a ghastly situation for a newly married man with a little boy only six months old", Arène replied, "Poor little thing. But must you tell him?"

Antonin Proust was also not devoid of wit, but he lacked the authentic manner. When the *Libre Parole* published his famous "Copenhagen letter", in which he naïvely avowed his financial relations with de Reinach, he appeared quite spruce and unconcerned among his fellows. But his social position, on which he set so much store, was fatally impaired.

His nightmare, however, was nothing compared with that of Baihaut, who was quite definitely the scapegoat, the bull which the audience had most uncompromisingly consigned to the sword. The little fat, shivering man, as Barrès has drawn him for us, first got up to defend himself and then ran to the magistrates to admit his guilt.

"All his friends flung themselves upon the prostrate Baihaut like an infuriated poultry house upon a sick and ailing chicken. But their action was more calculated; in devouring him they were concealing something whose existence might compromise themselves."<sup>1</sup>

Edmond Drumont goes further than that, and states that when Baihaut was in prison and applied for permission to see his dying daughter, his enemies contrived that it should be refused.

"Later on, Casimir Perrier, who had been the wretched man's second in a duel, was not allowed to remit even an hour of his sentence."<sup>2</sup>

All the chief actors in the Panama affair bear names still familiar in the public memory; some of them were destined later on to play very important political roles—Brisson, Loubet, Floquet, and a little behind them, but

<sup>1</sup> Maurice Barrès: *Leurs Figures*, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> Édouard Drumont.

ever ready to hurl himself into the arena, Clemenceau, before whom men quailed even then. His round head, the skull covered with grizzling bristly hair, his face cut in half by the heavy stiff moustache which gave him the Mongolian aspect which he retained till the end of his days, his black coat, chamois waistcoat, and grey trousers were celebrated everywhere in parliamentary circles. Like an impatient horse, he fidgeted, bridled, and pawed the ground, seeking for some one to devour. And he found several of them daily. His duel with Déroulède, that dramatic finale to the famous sitting of December 20th, is his most celebrated appearance in the Panama affair, but none will ever know the intrigues, the undermining, and the spadework which he carried on unweariedly.

In the opposing camp was Jules Delahaye, that athletic, energetic young man whose set mouth and cruel features justified his nickname of "the man who bites". "He was not merely impelled by hatred," says Maurice Barrès, "but by an avid bitter joy of battle like a gladiator who neither gives nor expects quarter." Moved by passion rather than righteous indignation, not even very well informed about the whole business, he rose up to arraign the implicated deputies, pointing out the suspects one by one with his finger, not daring to mention a single name in the tumult of abuse which assailed him. All the same, he did his work well; whatever his denunciation lacked in precision it made up for in ferocity. He was out to unleash the furies, and he did it.

In the shadows behind the politicians hovered the figure of the Baron de Reinach, a broad-shouldered man with a splendid vigorous body, which his friends ordered to be carved up after his death in a futile autopsy. Presumably it relieved their feelings.

But behind all these men, behind even the ill-fated Baron, was the real *deus ex machina*, the man who guided all the reins and made the puppets dance at his bidding. That curious popular instinct, which is seldom entirely deceived, was right in turning to him as the man who really held the key to the mystery. His name passed from mouth to mouth—Cornelius Herz. What had Cornelius

Herz said? What would he do? Whom would he implicate?

They hurled themselves against his silence in vain. The little, plebeian-looking man stayed in his retreat at Bournemouth, and the craftiest interrogator could not inveigle a word from his lips.

Cornelius Herz was not a figure of romance; he inspired neither confidence nor sympathy at first glance. He was perfectly aware of this. "Everything is ranged against me," he said once; "even my own appearance."

But his coldness and dullness disappeared when he talked. His black eyes radiated hypnotic influence, he had the supreme gift of suggestion, and he could make others believe what he wished.

His tastes were of the simplest. He despised money, or, rather, valued it just for what it was worth. In one morning he would buy a collection of pictures for three hundred thousand francs, and lunch in a Duval café for two francs fifty.

If you asked him about his profession he would reply vaguely that he was a "company promoter", a fatally descriptive phrase to our generation, and one which places him exactly where he belongs in that long line of adventurers which we know so well. He was the first representative of a type that to-day is numbered by the thousand.

What was his race and his native language? He spoke a jargon in which French, English, German, and Italian were oddly jumbled up, but in which English came finally to predominate.

He called himself a Doctor of Medicine and showed his credentials willingly, handling them like a card-sharper trying to convince you that the cards are not marked. He was a Member of the Academy of Science and Medicine of San Francisco; a Fellow of the Royal Historical and the Royal Geographical Societies of London, and a Member of the Imperial Institute; of the Society for Colonial and Military Studies in France; of the Society of Army Reserve Officers, and finally, he was an officer of the Legion of Honour.

He was born in Besançon in 1845, his parents being

Bohemian Jews. They emigrated to the United States, where he became a naturalized American citizen, but he returned to Europe at the age of twenty-one to lead that extraordinary vagabond existence which makes his life read like a picaresque novel.

At one time he turns up as consultant to a mental home; at another, in New York, as a specialist in mental diseases; then as a business man and a financier. About the time of the Franco-Prussian War he married and returned to France, taking up a post as an Army doctor.

He is next heard of being chased across the Atlantic by two Americans whom he had swindled in Chicago. Then back in Paris again, penniless, but accompanied by another citizen of the United States, Graham Bell, who had in his pocket the most astonishing discovery of the century—the telephone.

Herz and his fellow citizen took a little office in the rue de la Bourse and tried to get support for the marvellous invention. At first everybody laughed at them. Breguet introduced them to the Academy of Science, where the idea was treated as a joke. But Herz was indefatigable; he organized publicity, importuned and intrigued until at last he succeeded in obtaining official permission to lay the telephone wires between Versailles and Paris for a preliminary trial. It was successful. The Minister's office was connected with the Palace, and a conversation took place. The telephone was triumphantly installed.

Herz had at last found his real vocation. Under the shelter of this or that scientific discovery or invention he could henceforth penetrate first the worlds of business and finance and ultimately into politics.

There was hardly an industrial or financial venture between 1875 and 1889 which he did not direct. He had an unparalleled gift for intrigue, was completely devoid of scruple, and stuck at no means to achieve his ends. He could be generous, if necessary, and he saw everything on the grand scale.

Exactly how and when did the Panama business start? Nobody knows; the whole affair is still full of unexplored

shadows. It is certain that in 1880 Herz and the Baron de Reinach were associated, and that each had a chosen group of Parliamentary creatures. Each of them had also a newspaper under his influence—in the one case *Justice* with Jules Ranc and Clemenceau; in the other, the *République Française* with Antonin Proust and Jules Roche. The two manipulators used to meet, it is said, in the office of a certain engineer called Chabert, where they held council of war and sometimes quarrelled violently. All this was known to hundreds of people in Paris and was rumoured covertly in the Chamber and around the newspaper offices. But the public as yet had heard no word.

The first hint came to them in the form of a violent attack in the *Libre Parole* by an obscure financier named Martin, who signed himself "Micros". His articles made general accusations of fraud and jobbery against de Reinach and his political associates, but nothing very definite emerged. This was in October 1892. A few weeks later the *Libre Parole* returned to the fray, but this time it was not the Baron who was attacked, but a long string of politicians whose names were given in black and white.

What had happened in the interval was this. Reinach, in a panic, had gone to the *Libre Parole*, and had offered, in exchange for a cessation of the attacks on himself, the names of all those deputies who had received money from Herz on behalf of the de Lesseps company. The list was sent to the paper by its director Edmond Drumont—then serving a sentence for sedition in the Saint Pelagie Prison—through the agency of his old housekeeper. The Baron meant to kill two birds with one stone: to get back the support of the anti-parliamentary faction by throwing them their prey, and to scare the terrified Government into refusing an inquiry. Blackmail succeeded blackmail, but it soon became patent that the game was up.

The affair, as we have said, is too complicated for us to follow all its ramifications. We can only briefly record the howl of public execration which the disclosures provoked. The *Libre Parole* circulated from one end of the country to the other, and aroused a frenzy of hatred

against the whole mob of "cheque takers" without discrimination between the innocent and the guilty. Mob justice is never very gentle, but when it is ranged against politicians its fury knows no bounds.

The particular quality of the outbursts merits a little analysis. It was inevitably to be exaggerated by the scandalous scenes in the Chamber later on, but its peculiarity was nascent in its first outcry. It was something altogether new in the history of the Republic; it was an expression of hatred and contempt for the elected representatives of the people as such.

That hard intelligence with which the French as a race have been endowed more liberally, perhaps, than others, enables each man to judge his neighbour for what he is, not for his advantages of person, fortune, or rank. From this arises that profound absence of mutual respect, that jealousy, that mania for equality which distinguishes the French. It follows that if any one among us stumbles, defaults, or strays from the paths of rectitude, there suddenly springs up against him a barricade which is the more formidable in proportion to his former prestige. All the jealousy which has been accumulating against him little by little as he rose up is unloosed in an instant. But when the offender is a politician, that is to say, a man whom the people themselves have raised up and furnished with weapons, then their rage becomes a fury without hope of mercy. This is what was shown so clearly at the time of the Panama affair, and it will be demonstrated again and again in contemporary history.

Another point to which attention must be called is that the affair dug a sudden gulf between Parliament and the Press. Attacked on all sides by journals of all factions, baffled and hounded by abuse and ridicule, commanded either to condemn itself or to resign, the Government could not fail to be aware how far public opinion had been inflamed by the Press. Maurice Barrès, who is not, however, always impartial, writes:

"The parliamentary world was devoured by a cancer of rage and fear. The Chamber sat continually all

the week, having devoted four days of this time to a futile attempt to suppress the liberty of the Press. On the 17th M. Pichon, in the course of discussion, had occasion to mention the word 'journalists,' and an audible rustle of hatred (chronicled by the official report as a 'sensation') convulsed the whole house, so marked that the speaker paused and said, 'God knows that I can barely bring myself to pronounce the word.'"

Following this came the suicide of the Baron de Reinach, and from the 21st of November, when Jules Delahaye launched his accusation in the Chamber, until the Commission of Enquiry was definitely appointed, the House was in an uproar. All the principal actors rallied their supporters at the top of their voices; assault, repulse, and counter-assault were hurled across the floor until the Homeric combat culminated in the Clemenceau-Dérouté duel.

The Commission of Enquiry, which should have brought illumination, brought only confusion, and liberated the basest intrigues. None knew who was hunter and who quarry, and all the political parties, all the newspapers and the officials of the Panama company poured oil upon the flames.

The simple public fastened on to one thing only in all this confusion. To them every one connected with Parliament was bespattered with mud from the malodorous torrent, and all the deputies were tarred equally with the brush of *chequard*. That fatal word became the topic of every song, gibe, anecdote, and demonstration. All along the boulevards itinerant vendors sold songs and broadsheets, "Who Hasn't had his Little Cheque", "How and where to Touch", "Mind you Get the Real Cheque", and so on. Caran d'Ache issued an album of drawings, *Chic et le Cheque*, and hundreds of caricatures appeared all over the place. Comedians, cabaret singers, and every one else found the "cheque" a mine of inexhaustible satire.

Nobody troubled to wade through the dull reports of

the Commission of Enquiry. All the public bought the newspapers for so avidly was to follow the progress of Cornelius Herz.

That agile adventurer, it need hardly be said, had not waited to feel the heavy hand of the police on his shoulder. He had prudently crossed the Channel and settled down in Bournemouth, from which salubrious resort he could snap his fingers at the French authorities. In vain they fussed about extradition warrants and judicial enquiries; he managed to evade them all. In case the fear which he knew he inspired in parliamentary circles should not prove sufficient safeguard against an angry nation, he decided to become an invalid. From that time the whole thing became a farce. Doctors were called in consultation and gravely issued bulletins; the diplomatic authorities began to take interest, distinguished visitors left their cards, and the gallery read all the reports in the newspapers like instalments of a serial. Cornelius Herz became the public joke.

There was, however, a rival claimant to this role. This was Arton (born Aaron), an Alsatian Jew. He had been well known on the Bourse as an unlucky speculator and a reckless gambler, but he always managed somehow to wriggle out of his difficulties. His tact and ability had attracted the attention of the Baron de Reinach, who had adopted him as a kind of publicity agent and introduced him to the parliamentary antechamber.

Once there Arton found his true sphere and rapidly became indispensable. In his lavish distribution of the Panama company's money he must have managed to earmark a fair proportion for himself, for he lived on the most prodigal scale and gave himself over to insane extravagancies. When the Panama scandal burst, Arton was revealed as one of the principal cheque-distributors, and so he figured in the public eye as another, but less sinister, Cornelius Herz.

All the police of Europe were warned to look out for him, purely as a matter of form, of course, for no Government had the slightest intention of arresting him. But the pretence gave the newspapers an additional joke for



their readers. Cartoons showed Arton peacefully feeding the pigeons outside St. Mark's with a friendly bodyguard of the detectives who had been sent to arrest him.

All these things tended to turn the Panama affair from a scandal into a joke, and when the mob laughs it is disarmed.

There were, of course, a certain number of formal acquittals by the Tribunal, and a much smaller number of condemnations. The affair, however, was now practically settled to every one's satisfaction, except perhaps to that of the unfortunate Baihaut, who had been so unwise as to confess.

A few months later the sensation was revived again by Lucien Millevoye, who, thinking he had at last got to the truth, read out to the Chamber a faked dossier which had been sold to him. For five or six hours there was uproar. The old hatreds and fears that men had thought appeased broke out in all their fury. Again the two fundamental divisions of the Chamber found themselves face to face—Boulangists on one side and anti-Boulangists on the other.

To sum it all up, the Panama scandal was really an attempt on the part of the anti-parliamentary party, the former supporters of the General, to use the malpractices of certain deputies to discredit the whole parliamentary régime and to excite a militant nationalist movement—a double consummation which they partly achieved, but which in neither case proved to be as far-reaching as they hoped.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE ANARCHIST ACTIVITY

THE period of anarchist activity between 1890 and 1894 is one of the most curious in the history of the Republic. It is necessary, in order to appreciate it correctly, to go back a little into its origins and see how it expanded into its last phase with the Dreyfus case, with which it almost insensibly merged.

On June 19th 1880 a general amnesty was granted to all the political delinquents of the Commune and after. This meant the return to Paris of Rochefort, Vallès, Guesde, and Lafargue to resume their revolutionary apostolate.

A few months afterwards, at the Socialist Congress at Havre, Jules Guesde and his friends introduced on their platform the principle of the "class war", a fight to the finish with bourgeois conceptions, admitting neither respite nor concession. At the same time Rochefort in *L'Intransigeant*, Vallès in the *Cri du Peuple*, and Lafargue in *L'Égalité* were carrying on a violent campaign against the capitalist parties, denouncing the incapacity of those who had conducted the war, exposing the "massacres" in terms of horror and execration, and revealing the campaign of calumny which the bourgeois Press had waged against the Communards. They called upon all the workers of France to unite solidly in the new proletarian party.

Their campaign was naturally furthered by the successive parliamentary and financial scandals, Daniel Wilson and the traffic in decorations, the Union Générale crash, and the Panama affair.

"My generation" (wrote Paul Adam, on the day when Fédér and Bontoux, the Union Générale promoters, were sentenced) "was then in its twenties. All we students avidly devoured Karl Marx, and I remember the ragged copy of *Das Kapital*, torn, dog's-eared,

stained with the coffee of countless café-tables and the cigarette ash of countless sleepless nights, which we passed round and annotated and discussed. . . . The monstrous iniquity of the capitalist régime appeared in lurid light, and we sighed as we thought of the miserable millions ruined by the machinations of Semitic bankers.

"What had not been swallowed up in that maw? Those modest patrimonies so honestly and industriously laid up, sou by sou, by our hard-working forefathers, farmers, doctors, civil servants, butchers, bakers, and candlestick-makers . . . those poor little fortunes of a few thousand francs or so representing a daughter's dowry, a son's educational expenses, or a decent provision for old age, that had been gathered together so painfully in damp, shabby old houses where the mice ran over the floor, and the chipped crockery and the clock minus its glass shade recalled the hardships suffered by our people in the successive financial debauches of the Revolution and the Empire. . . . Lawyers and magistrates now can do nothing but try to console the poor defrauded women as they despairingly make their hopeless calculations afresh."

Landowners at the end of their resources were desperately selling their property where and how they could, and the agricultural world experienced a succession of lean harvests with wages falling and bankruptcies multiplying all round.

It was impossible in these circumstances that the army of discontent should not have grown, and that when Guesde, Vallès, and Rochefort, and presently the savage pencil of Forain, arraigned bourgeois society, they should not have found ready and eager listeners.

The spectacle of the antics of the Government was equally encouraging to them. The Radical Party was united only in its anti-clerical activities and was always to be found divided and impotent whenever a vital national issue was at stake. It had just abandoned Egypt to England for the sole pleasure of annoying M. de Freycinet; it had lost in the financial scandals what slight vestige of

honourable reputation it retained, and it had not implemented a single social reform. It showed activity only in baiting priests or silencing criticism.

In 1883, Kropotkin was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, and Paul Lafargue, the son-in-law of Karl Marx, to two. Henri Rochefort was suspended from his deputy's seat; any protesting voice was brutally silenced. Strikes were broken by armed force and fusillades.

And so an atmosphere favourable to revolutionary activities rapidly developed. But while the mass of the working classes enrolled in the Socialist Party, seduced by the purely material benefits which they hoped to get from triumphant Communism, a certain number of the pure intellectuals and of the imperfectly instructed Communists leant towards Anarchism, the supreme glorification of the individual.

One of the irritants which aroused these intellectual aristocrats was compulsory military service, which forced them to endure months or years of irksome discipline in company with the dregs of the population. Lucien Descaves, Abel Hermant, and Paul Bonnetain had hardly escaped from the Army when they began to denounce the miseries they had been through—the arrogance of the officers, the bullying of the non-commissioned officers, the frightful atmosphere of the Army and all its works. These attacks rallied together all the young writers and would-be writers, all the self-constituted opponents of prejudice, custom, and hypocrisy, and all those who for one reason or another were in revolt against the fetters imposed by the society in which they lived.

The invincible power of money was soon to be exposed in the harsh light of publicity by a master hand. Édouard Drumont, unknown then but to leap into fame immediately, had just published *La France Juive*, a complete, precise, and formidable indictment of the financial leviathans of the period, mostly of Jewish origin, who, weighed down by their gold, pressed so heavily upon the country, corrupting integrity, poisoning goodwill, disseminating ruin and death in their train.

At the same time Maurice Barrès, in *L'ennemi des Lois*, *Un Homme Libre*, and in the whole series dedicated to the *Culte du Moi*, was exploring the ramifications of intellectual narcissism. Under the guise of an *apparatus criticus*, he glorified with all his charm and talent the cult of the seductive ego. An epicure of life, who had flirted with all philosophies without believing in any, an amateur of psychological adventure and a natural sceptic, he was peculiarly fitted for his self-chosen role. He was the perfect introvert; the man to whom the world exists only as a stage on which to display his own emotions and ideas. He threw himself into the anarchistic movement with the same superficial enthusiasm, veiling an inner contempt which he was to reveal later in connection with everything that he took up.

More ardent, more forceful and devastatingly sincere was Paul Adam, who in his *Critique des Mœurs* proclaimed his anarchistic tendencies without compromise or euphemism. Like Barrès, he had strayed into the ranks of the Boulangists, to emerge with no illusions but with an unquenchable rancour towards the electoral régime. Bourgeois and proletariat, reactionaries and Republicans seemed equally base to him; he could find integrity only in the ego, and thus he exalted its supremacy over the mass.

"Let us shatter all these cliques, destroy our base and degrading institutions, annihilate all and create something a little more worthy of the thing that is in us."

The typical anarchist of the period was generally an educated, or, at least, a supposedly educated, man. Very often, however, he was only self-educated, and his intellectual apparatus, formidable as it seemed to himself, was in fact only puerile by comparison with solid standards of science and scholarship. But it was enough to lend him a deceptive eminence from which he could regard the rest of society as from Olympian heights.

All that the daily commerce of life—its pains, hazards, and necessities—alone can teach humanity, passed these men by completely. They were anchorites voluntarily immured, men of a single book.

All restraints and discipline, whether deriving from religion, patriotism, or social exigency, were equally abhorrent to them. Hardly less abhorrent were the human emotions themselves; love, other than the unbridled satisfaction of the senses, excited nothing but ridicule, and pity nothing but disgust. Such was the intellectual monster produced by the society of 1885 to 1895, a society where power and knowledge had been too suddenly disseminated, where the machine was not stable enough to withstand the violent revolutions of its motive engine.

The first official political demonstration of the anarchist movement was in 1882 at Lyons, where Jean Grave had published a number of pamphlets and presently founded the first anarchist newspaper, *Le Droit Social*.

Jean Grave was a leather-worker turned printer, a self-taught man but with a quite genuine literary gift, as may be seen from his *La Société Mourante et L'Anarchie*, which cost him two months in prison. Like all his kind, he lived and worked alone, printing his paper on a small hand-press, and only emerging sometimes in the evening to go to the cheap café where he met his adherents.

These belonged to such trades as tailoring, carpentry, weaving, and leather-work, in which the workman has long and solitary hours to spend on a job and ample opportunity for reflection.

They talked of the events of the day, of politics, which, with the pathetic grandiloquence of the half-educated, they always called "philosophy"; but whatever they talked of they inevitably returned to the same complaint against society, affirming the same need for revolt against it. Some would exhort and counsel, others criticize and reject; but they formed within themselves a cenacle where no breath of the actual, diverse, living world outside ever penetrated. They were as remote from the civilization they assailed as Roman slaves in prison.

They would depart silently and without greetings, perhaps to meet to-morrow, perhaps never again. If a man disappeared there would be no questions asked, for a secret complicity, requiring neither orders nor

explanations, existed between them. They were anarchists, recognizing no leaders and no followers, making no plans and issuing no instructions. Each man was a law to himself.

These little gatherings, informal, even accidental at first, rapidly multiplied and strengthened. Soon they became affiliated with each other and took names. In Paris there was the Cercle International, La Groupe Libertaire, La Ligue des Antipatriotes, and Les Enfants de la Nature. All the principal industrial towns—Lyons, Bordeaux, Saint-Etienne, Lille, Roubaix, and Clermont Ferrand—were honeycombed with associations like these.

From such a setting sprang a man like Ravachol, who had five killings to his count and who would proudly show his right hand with its unhealed scars and say:

"See this hand? It has killed as many bourgeois as it has fingers."

Two of these men founded papers which were to gain some notoriety. The first was the aforementioned Jean Grave; the second Émile Pouget, with *Le Père Peinard*.

Émile Pouget was of lower middle-class origin. He had been a shop-assistant and had been active in promoting trades unionism among the employees of the big shops, but he suddenly veered from collectivism to anarchy. He was arrested during a riot with Louise Michel and sentenced to seven years' imprisonment, being, however, released after he had served three. He then founded *Le Père Peinard* in Montmartre, a paper which passed through many vicissitudes, but was probably the most popular and influential of the anarchist sheets.

It is a curious fact that while the ex-workman Jean Grave always employed the most correct and measured language in his paper, whose articles were for the most part purely theoretical, the shrewder and more business-like Pouget deliberately set out to inflame the lower elements. He went in for violent and abusive headings: "A Swinish Order", "Colonial Blackguardism", "Women for all", etc.

There were several women prominent in these circles, strange, exalted creatures even more virulent than the

men. There was Louise Quitrine, another trades-unionist turned anarchist; Ivanec, an Austrian married to a French bookbinder, very energetic and a fluent speaker; Dotz, a German with a deep, throaty voice, always to the fore at public meetings, and, finally the Red Virgin, Louise Michel herself.

Louise Michel was almost repellent to look at, yet her plainness was redeemed by an acute and lively intelligence. Her perpetual black frock and small black hat with its veil streaming behind (rather like a Protestant pastor's wife) have now come to serve for us as a symbolical statue of Anarchy. She was the apostle of Woman, enslaved throughout the ages by the brutal domination of the male, and her whole life was passed in an attempt to shatter these chains. Before a bewitched and delirious audience she would evoke her memories of the Commune: "There has been no sweeter moment in my life," she cried, "than when I saw Paris burning, the flames shooting up before my eyes into a lurid sky, the supreme masterpiece of a supreme artist."

Wherever she appeared there was immense enthusiasm. Children brought flowers to her, men would speak of her as "the greatest figure of our times" or "the greatest force of the Revolution", and would add: "The name of Louise Michel resounds over the whole of Europe; it lifts up our hearts and makes us forget our defeats."

Then Louise Michel would get up on the platform; and, intoxicated with words and applause, would paint in glowing colours her ideal of liberty. Complete emancipation of the individual, no more hunger, no more cold, no more want and misery. No further need of law, police, or governments. Science would overthrow all obstacles, and men, the masters of science, would be masters of nature itself.

At this climax the audience would rise to its feet in wild enthusiasm, and Louise Michel would be triumphantly borne off on the shoulders of her supporters.

While Jean Grave and the dour Émile Henry, who was soon to pass from talking into the sphere of direct action, were disseminating anarchist doctrines, a group of young



writers, including Paul Adam, Hamard, Barrucard, and Bernard Lazare, used to forgather at the Café Carazza, under the title of La Groupe de l'Idée Nouvelle.

The entrance fee was sixty centimes. The members did not carry bombs in their pockets, but they imbibed nevertheless the pure milk of anarchist doctrine, exalting the role of the individual against the community and arraiguing the whole corpus of bourgeois ideals.

Two years later the same group were associated with Zo d'Axa, one of the most picturesque figures of the movement, in the foundation of *En Dehors*.

Zo d'Axa, whose real name was Gallo de Lapérouse, was a descendant of the famous navigator, a handsome young man who had led a most disreputable life. He had been a cavalryman, but had deserted to Belgium; thence he had gone to Italy, where he ran an ultra-Catholic newspaper and seduced heaven knows how many women. Chased from one country to another by the police, he had profited by the general amnesty to return to France, where, being an agitator by temperament, he inevitably gravitated to the anarchist movement. He was a sort of Socialist *condottieri*, a dandy, a rake, and a natural adventurer. Ernest La Jeunesse nicknamed him the Restaurant Recruit.

The editorial offices of his paper, *En Dehors*, in the rue Bochart du Saron, constituted a sort of club for the pure intellectuals of the movement. Its frequenters included Octave Mirbeau, Jean Grave, Bernard Lazare, and many others. It was inevitable that *En Dehors* should manifest a regard for literature pure and unalloyed which was lacking in *La Révolte* and *Le Père Peinard*.

Finally, an influence enormously favourable to the new movement was exercised by a paper which, in the beginning, had not been designed to have any political affiliations. *La Revue Blanche* was a purely literary journal, but to it gravitated all the younger writers with advanced opinions. It never actually preached anarchist doctrines, but all its contributors were obviously influenced by them; less out of conviction than out of pure intellectual snobbery. Most of these contributors were

comfortable bourgeois who had not the slightest intention of hurling bombs in the street.

The proprietors of the paper, the brothers Natanson, belonged to that class of wealthy, intellectually inclined Jews who are never a second behind the fashion of the moment. They cultivated irony, scepticism, and epigram, by way of reaction against the ebullience of naturalistic prose, and affected a pose of absolute broad-mindedness regarding other people's opinions. The *Revue Blanche* clique, in fact, was an eviscerated edition of an anarchist club expressly adapted to the needs of literary men. Prominent among them were Jules Renard, Léon Blum, and Ernest La Jeunesse, who appeared to have assembled on his head the sum of ugliness which could possibly afflict humanity. His hideous face was crowned by a disreputable hat, and his voice was an excruciating and piercing falsetto. Everybody was frightened of him and deferred to him, except Camille Mauclair, who once gave him a memorable good hiding. He never paid his rent but compensated his landlord, so he said, by playing chess with him.

Toulouse-Lautrec came nearly every night, panting up the rickety stairs, puffing and cursing before bursting into the room like a thunderbolt. He was bent and lame, with a jet-black beard and glittering eyes, and he lived in Montmartre, close by the haunts of the models he has immortalized.

Around them hovered Bernard Lazare, infecting the group with his Semitic hypersensibility and disquiet.

Down to 1894 the anarchist movement remained an intellectual fashion, almost a snobbish affectation on the part of young writers and idle women who wanted to be in the movement, until the sharp detonation of bombs under their windows brought home to them the fact that undisciplined ideas have a way of materializing into unguarded action.

Social unrest was rife at the period. The institution of the May 1st holiday in 1890 had proved a pretext for disorderly scenes at a mass demonstration of workmen demanding an eight-hour day. The anniversary next

year was more sinister; nine men were killed by gunfire at Fourmies, provoking an immense outcry, not only in the anarchist and socialist Press, but almost everywhere.

Some months later the first essay in direct action occurred. On March 11th 1892 a house in the Boulevard Saint Germain inhabited by M. Benoit, one of the counsel appearing against three anarchists held for trial, was blown up. Fifteen days later there was a similar outrage on the building where the Public Prosecutor lived. The militant anarchist movement had begun, and continued in a rising crescendo of public indignation which culminated when Caserio assassinated President Carnot.

The natural horror which these crimes aroused was heightened by the fact that the authorities and everybody else knew that they were powerless to prevent them, conceived and executed as they were by solitary, unorganized fanatics. The harsh, forbidding silence and secrecy in which the militant anarchist lived was his most effective safeguard against the police. Every one knew that these attacks, planned in solitude and silence by a man prepared to give his life for the cause, could never be warded off, and hence panic inevitably took possession of the city as one outrage followed another. The Parisian habit of herding together in large blocks of flats intensified the danger.

“Landlords shudder” (said *Gil Blas*) “if they have got anybody connected with the law or the police among their tenants. In many cases they have given them notice to quit, while their neighbours fly to the country in abject terror.”

The most inoffensive parcel or object deposited outside a public building or in the hall of a block of flats threw those who discovered it into a state of panic. Municipal employees or the police were frenziedly summoned to transport, with infinite precautions, an old sardine tin full of sand and excrement. Practical jokers had the time of their lives. When they were not manufacturing fake bombs they were sending anonymous letters to inoffensive

citizens, charitably warning them that they were about to be blown up. *Gil Blas* tells how, after Véry's restaurant had been destroyed by a bomb, a man named Weil who had a flat in No. 22 rue Julien Lacroix, showed his neighbours a threatening letter which he had received, whereupon eighty-two working-class families decided to move on the spot. In vain the police tried to reassure them; it only increased their terror, and they redoubled their efforts to drag out all their belongings and pile them on barrows and hand-carts in the attempt to escape to a less dangerous locality.

When Ravachol, the first of the militant anarchists to be arrested, came up for trial at the Seine Assizes, another problem presented itself, that of the intimidation of the jury. Assailed by shoals of anonymous letters, insulted by inflammatory articles in all the anarchist papers, the wretched jurors were not likely to be reassured by seeing Véry's restaurant go up into the air on the very eve of the opening of the trial.

It was clear that nothing could be expected from them. Every one feared an outrage in open court, with the result that the public did not manifest any of its usual eagerness to crowd into a sensational trial and gaze on the little thin man with the cunning eyes whom it had taken ten men to hold down on the day when he was arrested.

Two months later Ravachol, who ought to have received the death sentence for civil homicide (he had five murders to his account), was found guilty, but with extenuating circumstances, and ordered penal servitude for life.

Such a verdict outraged public opinion. "Extenuating circumstances! Where did the jury find them? In the ashes of Véry's restaurant, I suppose!"

The President of the Assize Court was overwhelmed with reproaches and the jury openly accused of cowardice and failure to do their duty.

A cartoon in *Pilori* showed the President announcing the decision to a trembling and pallid court, with his bag at his feet packed ready for flight, under the legend "Who's afraid?"

When the sentence was set aside and Ravachol ordered to the guillotine after all, fury broke out in the opposite camp. The song which the criminal had contemptuously sung to the crowd at the foot of the guillotine was yelled out in the streets and at the anarchist meetings, while pictures of his head encircled by a nimbus were sold under the title of "The Great Martyr" and "The Christ of the Anarchist Movement."

Less ambitious ruffians were naturally not slow to avail themselves of such an example, and the profession of anarchist doctrines became a convenient pretext for any criminal with a grudge.

Two fresh explosions, the bombing of the police station in the rue des Bons-Enfants in November 1892 and the attack on the Chamber of Deputies in December 1893 gave proof that the subversive element was by no means intimidated. But in attempting to injure the persons of the deputies the anarchists made a tactical blunder, and Vaillant's bomb proved a fatal setback to the cause.

"The blast of reaction" (wrote Henri Varennes) "blew relentlessly from that day. In a single sitting the Chamber, without discussion, passed a modification of Articles 24 and 25 regarding the liberty of the Press, and regulations proscribing secret and unlawful associations and forbidding the possession of explosives were carried with equal celerity. A supplementary credit of 820,000 francs was voted to the Ministry of the Interior to augment the police department.

"They did not stop there, either, although every one was asking why, if these measures were likely to be efficacious, they had not been adopted before. Why had they been held in reserve until the Chamber itself was threatened?

"Some of the precautions were ludicrous. The rules of the Chamber were modified and access to the public galleries made virtually impossible."

The anarchist newspapers were prohibited and vendors of *Le Père Peinard*, *La Révolte*, or *La Revue Littéraire* made liable to imprisonment.

On January 1st there was a great police drive in the Seine district directed against all the anarchist clubs and rendezvous. Two thousand warrants were issued and thousands of letters to "suspects" were seized and investigated.

The trial of Vaillant himself, the perpetrator of the attack on the Palais Bourbon, was conducted with the minimum of judicial delay. He was sentenced at the beginning of January and executed on the 5th of the month following.

This vigorous offensive was met by increasing acts of violence on the part of the anarchists. Seven days after the execution of Vaillant, Émile Henry's bomb exploded outside the Café Terminus, followed by the explosions in the rue Saint Jacques and the Faubourg Saint Germain, perpetrated by the Belgian, Jean Pauwels, who was killed by the explosion of a bomb in his pocket just as he was going into the Madeleine. On the 4th of April the front of Foyot's Restaurant was blown up, injuring several of the diners, including that intellectual libertarian Laurent Tailhade, whose words on the occasion of the outrage on the Palais Bourbon were ironically recalled: "If the gesture behind it is noble, what does the act matter?"

A few days afterwards, Émile Henry was tried and condemned. He was the complete and undiluted anarchist, not a common criminal like Ravachol nor a distracted unfortunate like Vaillant, but a frigid and sceptical intellectual, with a shrivelled face, sharp nose, and pallid cheeks; a suppressed madman petrified by hatred and pride—"the Saint-Just of anarchism" as a journalist called him.

He was also, it would seem, the grave-digger of the movement, for with the exception of the assassination of President Carnot by the abominable Caserio, no more outrages of the kind were perpetrated in France. The public were united in their determination to stamp them out, and thousands even of advanced thinkers recoiled before the horror which their speculations had encouraged.

This account of some of the chief phases of the

movement would not be complete if it omitted some of the lesser men and incidents, which, if less striking than the outrages of Ravachol, Vaillant, and Émile Henry were nevertheless not without significance and even a touch of the picturesque.

The Soup Kitchen Meetings, which brought Rousset into the dock, give a striking instance of the sympathy extended to the anarchists from the most diverse quarters. These meetings, which were a feature of the winter of 1891, provided free meals for several thousand destitute people, to whom the blessings of anarchy were unfolded while they ate. We do not require the aid of the vivid descriptions which abound in the Press of the period to enable us to conjure up the excitement and enthusiasm which these exhortations aroused in an audience so recently stimulated by warmth and food.

It was a great joke to the audience when the names of their generous benefactors were announced. Among the principal subscribers to the enterprises were Naguez, Anatole France, Veil-Picard, Jules Simon, etc. Most of these had been hoodwinked by Rousset into believing that they were contributing to a work of bona fide philanthropy, and there had been responses from the most unlikely quarters. Sarah Bernhardt had contributed a hundred francs, and Paulus had presented free theatre tickets for sale.

Probably it was the respectability of his subscribers which saved Rousset from a heavier sentence: he was only charged with begging and got off with four months.

Another amusing incident was that connected with the cabman Moore, although it did not, unfortunately, turn out so well for him.

This Moore, a bald little man with a straggly beard and a generally furtive appearance, had received the signal honour of being recognized as a poet by Victor Hugo. Amused by his Jehu's confidences on the subject of his poetical aspirations, Hugo had said one day, "Why, we are colleagues. You must come and dine with me."

Moore required no pressing and duly turned up at the poet's house in the avenue Eylau, where Hugo gravely did

the honours, introducing him as a brother poet. Some time later, Moore was again driving Hugo when the poet said, "As you have always driven me in this life, I should like you to take me on my last journey."

And so, when he heard of Hugo's death, the little cabman went to the house and demanded the honour of driving the hearse. It was refused him, and from that time on Moore cherished a grievance against society.

Grievances notoriously breed like rabbits. Moore became humanitarian, socialist, and finally anarchist. He frequented public meetings, composed and declaimed inflammatory verses against the bourgeoisie, fomented strikes and finally, when they all got tired of him, went back to the streets of Paris. Here one day he encountered Édouard Lockroy, and thereafter hung on to him like a leech, perpetually soliciting money, recommendations, or other assistance, all in the name of Victor Hugo.

The exasperated Lockroy finally shut the door in his face, whereupon Moore in a fury got possession of a revolver, waited on Lockroy as he came out of a political meeting, and fired. Happily the bullet glanced off Lockroy's waistcoat button and no harm was done.

At any other time Moore would certainly have aroused a certain amount of sympathy and been acquitted. But the anarchist outrages had stiffened all the benches and he got six years' hard labour.

Richard, another unlucky and impulsive creature, got twenty years for what was practically only a civil offence, all because he was foolhardy enough to make a declaration of anarchist principles.

Villisse, a poor, wretched workman, took it into his head to demonstrate against the Russian sailors in the year of the alliance when they were being fêted at the Hôtel de Ville. He abused those round him who were cheering them, and finally, pulling a revolver out of his pocket, attempted to draw on the crowd. His weapon jammed and no one was actually hurt, but the jury elected to consider his offence as an anarchist outrage and gave him five years.

Finally, the Government, desiring to justify itself



against indignant public opinion, arraigned a certain number of intellectuals as the moral accomplices of the assassins. This is what is known as the Trial of the Thirty.

The prosecution was badly initiated and badly conducted. It became obvious to every one that the Government were merely seeking a pretext to muzzle the Press. The jury declined to give the Public Prosecutor his case and the accused were acquitted.

The Trial of the Thirty, by the number and quality of the accused and the piquant juxtaposition together in the dock of authentic criminals and eminent men, created an immense sensation. The public crowded into the court to gaze at the unusual spectacle: the intellectuals had been provided with front seats with the common desperadoes behind them.

The cross-examination strengthened the conviction of disingenuousness aroused by the opening speeches, and despite the efforts of the Public Prosecutor and the direction of the judge, the jury refused to confound the writers who had committed no overt act against law and order with admitted criminals. The publicists were acquitted, and Ortiz and Chericotti, found guilty of robbery without extenuating circumstances, were sentenced to fifteen and eight years' hard labour respectively.

The verdict lifted an immense weight from the Press, which had been living in daily dread of the muzzle. The advanced organs, *La Libre Parole*, *La Petite République*, and *L'Intransigeant* opened a violent campaign against the Public Prosecutor and the magistracy, and Rochefort, in the articles entitled "Vomitings" and "The Man in the Iron Mask", showed a ferocity unparalleled even by him.

These papers were in their turn arraigned before the courts. And again the jury voted their acquittal. The Press of all parties registered relief this time. Magnard wrote in *Figaro*:

"There is nothing more dangerous than the strong hand misapplied. To arraign men whose doctrines, however reprehensible in themselves, contain nothing

precise enough to be construed as legally subversive, to attempt to discredit them publicly and to associate them in criminal complicity with common malefactors who had never even seen them, is not merely a travesty of justice but a signal political blunder."

This was the opinion of the overwhelming majority of ordinary Frenchmen.

## CHAPTER X

### THE FRANCO-RUSSIAN ALLIANCE

THE depressing chapters of administrative scandal and social upheaval which we have just chronicled may now at last be quitted for a more agreeable subject. The Russian Alliance of 1892 to 1896 gave the country new stimulus and confidence. It was, in fact, almost hysterically successful. If we want a phrase to evoke the particular quality of those years we cannot do better than take the title of one of Jean Lorrain's novels—*Très Russes*.

The fashionable world was very Russian; every one was hailed as "Little Father" or "Moujik"; every one was very absent-minded and temperamental. We were all, in fact, a little mad. The Alliance was like a refuge offered to a shipwrecked mariner: he clutches, breathes, and is saved. France, so long isolated and discredited, rejoiced to find one nation at last holding out a friendly hand, and her happiness was reinforced by the knowledge that she was establishing a not inconsiderable breakwater against the formidable Triple Alliance.

The arrival of the Russian Fleet under Admiral Avellan in Toulon was the signal for an outburst of pro-Muscovite fervour. Toulon received them in a bower of flowers; garlanded triumphal arches spanned the streets through which the Russians passed, and carriages hung with violets, mimosa, and carnations carried them in triumph through the city. Even the horses bore the Russian livery.

The visitors were enchanted and a little bewildered at this spring-time fête staged in the fall of the year. They caught the bouquets that were flung in mid-air and returned them gracefully to the crowd; they endured with tireless good humour the perpetual rain of confetti with which their hair and clothes were strewn; they laughed and seemed to be delighted at everything, whereupon the two or three thousand people in their vicinity laughed to see them laugh and redoubled their zeal. It was

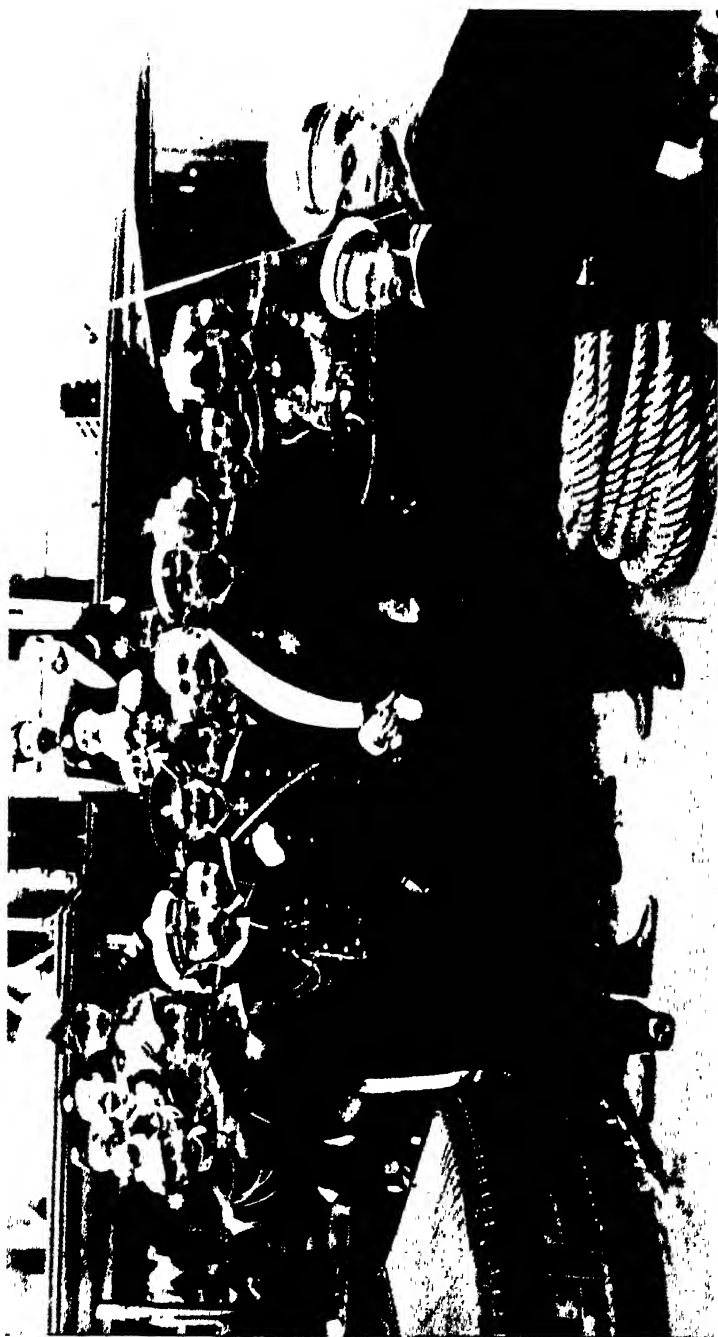
like a gigantic family festivity, prolonged over sixty hours.

Their arrival in Paris unloosed the heavy artillery of national enthusiasm. All the street sellers hawked "Muscovite Ties" and "Kronstadt Pipes" at nineteen sous, while for thirty sous you could buy the "Alliance Lantern" with a French soldier's head on one side and moujik's on the other, both with transparent eyes to let the light through. All the women had black and yellow ribbons in their hats, and the men little buttons on their lapels with the colours of the two nations and the motto "Kronstadt-Toulon". The Franco-Russian tie was a startling affair of bright yellow with a black double-headed eagle and the tricolour stripe. Tobacco pouches with views of Kronstadt, match-boxes with portraits of Admiral Avellan, every Franco-Russian toy which human ingenuity could devise, were made and sold by the thousand.

Old Parisians recalled that not since the return of Napoleon's troops from Italy had such excitement been witnessed in the streets. The high-water mark was reached when the Russian officers requested to be allowed to pay official honours at the obsequies of Marshal MacMahon; who had died while they were in Paris. This graceful gesture went straight to French hearts and proved an enduring cement to the Russian Alliance for almost twenty years.

Three years later, in 1896, the same scenes were repeated when the Tsar himself came to Paris. France at that time had acquired a President who considered himself fully equipped to entertain a Tsar of all the Russias. It is curious to note that the ludicrous pretensions and parvenu manners of Félix Faure incited much less ridicule and satire than had the angular silhouette of the unfortunate Sadi Carnot. The public instinctively loves pomp and is therefore prepared to overlook pompousness. But perhaps it would be kinder to say that the excitement and importance of the Franco-Russian Alliance invested the President's overweening pride and ostentation with a veiling of decent excuse.

At half-past ten on that sunny, radiant morning of



THE TSAR NICOLAS II AND PRESIDENT FÉLIX FAURE



October 6th 1896 Their Imperial Majesties steamed into Paris to a fanfare of trumpets and drums. Outside the Ranelagh station the whole of Paris, inflated by enthusiasm as by an intoxicating vapour, went up in wild delight.

What a triumph for Félix Faure in his very heraldic procession, with his white-wigged coachman and his grooms in blue and silver, his four-horse carriage and his outriders in bright livery. He almost came to regard himself, during that memorable visit, as a blood brother of the Tsar.

The visit did not pass off entirely without incident. One day a lunch had been arranged to present to the Tsar the flower of the French aristocracy, and the choicest remaining vintage of the old régime had been assembled, including Princesse Mathilde, the Duc and Duchesse d'Aumale, the Duc and Duchesse de Chartres, and the Duc and Duchesse de Rohan. All these distinguished persons were waiting for their luncheon, but Nicholas II had not arrived.

After an exceptionally heavy programme in the morning the Tsar had retired to change his clothes for the luncheon. Worn out by fatigue, he had fallen asleep in his room, and nobody dared to wake him up: not, at least, until half an hour or more had passed. And then ensued the extraordinary spectacle of that august and distinguished assembly racing through a meal as never before in their dignified lives: dish followed dish with lightning rapidity, knives and forks fairly flew at their task, plates and glasses were whisked away and the whole table rose without even the offer of dessert. It must have been the shortest formal luncheon in history.

Another curious anecdote is reported by Ernest Raynaud, whose official position as special police guard attached to their Majesties brought him for a while into close intimacy with them.

One night the Empress awoke with a start and declared that she could hear shots aimed against her windows. Obviously she was mistaken, but all the same it was necessary to summon the guard and investigate.

"The Empress, in a dressing gown" (says Ernest Raynaud) "was prostrated in an arm-chair and round her a respectful and solicitous group composed of Baron Morenheim, Prince Obolensky, and an old gentleman in spectacles whom I took to be a doctor. A little way off stood the Emperor, looking at her with a ruffled brow. As soon as he saw me his face cleared, and without waiting for me to be formally presented to him, he held out his hand and apologized for disturbing us. Then he presented me to the Empress, who gave a distraught stare. The Emperor, who spoke French well, then questioned me about the guard and whether there had been any street disturbances. I replied that there had not, whereupon he begged me to assure her Majesty personally that there was nothing to fear. I did so, with more outward assurance than inner conviction. He then in his turn implored her to calm herself, whereupon she burst out: 'Light of my soul, if I am afraid it is less for myself than for Your Majesty's august person and for Olga, that precious gift of heaven.' Then she sprang up and would insist on going to see her daughter there and then.

"The room where the little grand-duchess slept was on the second floor. There was the child, peacefully asleep in a little white-curtained brass bed, with the nurse's bed alongside.

"The Empress went up to the latter and spoke to her in English, very quietly so as not to awaken the child. Then she went up to the cot and bent over it in a passion of tenderness. The Tsar, who accompanied her, did the same, putting his arm about her waist as he pressed against her in the narrow space between the beds. I could see their faces touch for an instant. I felt as though I had strayed in upon some intimate domestic scene in humble life, and the unpretentious little room lent strength to the illusion. Nothing could be less sumptuous than the little bedchamber with its plain grey wall-paper, its little brass beds, linoleum square and rush-seated chairs, its scanty ornaments and playthings and its bamboo screen with panels of flowered cretonne."



What sentimental outpourings in the Press such a scene would have excited, had any reporters been present.

The capital kept its enthusiasm at fever pitch during the whole visit. Provincials and foreigners arrived in large numbers and the theatres exhausted their ingenuity in providing topical entertainments. The Olympia staged *Les Deux Peuples*, the Théâtre de Belleville, *Gloire aux Allies*, and the Nouveau Théâtre Glinka's *Vie pour le Tsar*.

Yet it must be recorded that the Alliance, in fact, was nothing but a stock move in the diplomatic gambit, and despite all the enthusiasm it called forth it had no lasting influence on the relations of the two peoples.

A much more enduring influence was that of Tolstoi and the Nordic writers and thinkers, Ibsen, Björnson, Strindberg, and Hauptmann. These were the gods of the intelligentsia between 1886 and 1896, displacing the naturalistic writers and leaving their mark similarly, if not equally, upon the national literature and even in some degree upon the manner and daily life of our people.

In 1888 the Théâtre-Libre presented Tolstoi's *Power of Darkness*. In 1890 appeared Ibsen's *Ghosts* and *The Wild Duck*. While these plays were arousing the enthusiasm of critics, Melchior de Vogüe's book on the Russian novel appeared, analysing and interpreting the strange ideals of Dostoëvski, Gogol, Turgenev, Pushkin, and the rest.

The ideas which these works set in motion were something quite new to the French mind. The conceptions of world pity, resignation and non-resistance to evil began to work on the literary leaven, while, on the other hand, the revolutionary sentiments of Ibsen's heroes and heroines, the revolt of the former from the tyranny of society and of the latter from the tyranny of man, provoked a certain amount of response from the general public.

Naturally, conceptions so foreign to the Latin temperament did not make headway without resistance. Most people were inclined to look askance at the Ibsen plays, ridiculing their apparent *naïveté*, guffawing at what then

passed for audacities and contemptuously dismissing the general sentiment. Many influential critics even, with Francisque Sarcey among them, supported and enjoined this view.

The thurifers of this priesthood of the Northern Twilight burnt incense more and more frantically. They almost swooned with emotion at Antoine's or Lugné-Poë's first nights, and feverishly lapped up every scrap of information regarding Tolstoi, who was then freely giving to the world his opinions on all things under heaven. This new intellectual snobbishness was at its height in the years following 1893. Everybody wanted to live his or her "own life" according to the Ibsen formula, and the growing changes in French social life—changes which in a few years were going to produce such phenomena as the "emancipated woman" and the "half virgin"—can be largely traced to the influence of the northern literature.

. . . . .

It has been said already that the French Press underwent a great change after the fall of Marshal MacMahon. We have already examined the influence of the naturalist movement upon it, and we must add to that the effect which vastly improved machinery, giving greater rapidity in composition and printing, inevitably had upon the form and contents of papers. They increased the number of their pages, although not the actual size of the sheet, lowered their prices, and did not go to press until much later than of old. And the telegraph, soon to be reinforced by that powerful ally the telephone, furnished a new and revolutionary channel of information. Gossip began to be shouldered out by news, articles tended to become more and more condensed, and imagination and fantasy, less in demand now than news of facts, began to play a very much reduced part in the papers' contents.

One of the principal journalistic innovations of the period was the interview, which enabled the journalist, or rather the reporter, to penetrate the lives of his contemporaries more closely than ever, restricting the historic canvas, as it were, to the actual scene of which he himself,

his "subject", and his readers were all equally a part. Properly done, such an interview may afford posterity with the most valuable contemporary data, and it must be conceded that, on the whole, the Parisian Press between 1890 and 1900 has served us admirably in that respect. The method had not yet been abused, and reporters still took the trouble to write decent French.

*Figaro*, under the direction first of Magnard, and then of Rodays and Perivier, was still the most important paper of the period.

Magnard was a worthy successor to Villemessant, ever on the alert to find something to put life into his paper, to which he was devoted body and soul. He had an acute sense of what the public wanted; he was not afraid to excite or annoy it, but he was always careful to follow an attack or hostile criticism with a soothing compliment or an adroit twist. He had a sound and a continuously sound judgement and by this he acquired, little by little, his almost uncanny hold upon his readers. "At one time," said André Maurel, "Magnard wielded the greatest influence in Paris. But he was always content with influence, and he resisted all temptations to extend it or divert it into a wider or more concrete field."<sup>1</sup>

After Magnard, *Figaro* fell under the direction of F. de Rodays and A. Perivier, each of whom immediately undid whatever the other attempted. Rodays, who was petulant, excitable, and irritating, always behaved as though he had sole authority. More calmly but very persistently Perivier did the same, with the result that life was made intolerable for Gaston Calmette, their excellent editorial secretary and liaison officer.

Under their régime the offices of the paper were enlarged, transformed, and embellished, and on December 1st 1895 it triumphantly appeared as the first French newspaper to give its readers six pages.

*Figaro* was to fall on evil days during the Dreyfus case. Fernand de Rodays sided with the revisionists, and his attitude caused shoals of cancelled subscriptions. There followed two very bad years for Villemessant's old paper,

<sup>1</sup> André Maurel: *Souvenirs d'un Ecrivain*. (Hachette.)

but de Rodays would not go back on his convictions. On the contrary, they became more and more emphatic and, with the assistance of that eminent Dreyfusard Cornély, the paper still managed to hold out against its opponents; but at last it became obvious that it could not go on. So the unwanted cargo was thrown overboard, and Gaston Calmette, who had done most of the work of the paper for years, assumed the direction.

After *Figaro*, *Le Gaulois* ranked as the leading paper of the period.

To speak of *Le Gaulois* is to think of Arthur Meyer, that admirable journalist and picturesque personality, lineal successor to Girardin and Villemessant. His paper cannot be considered apart from him; it was included almost in his corporeal make up; it at once proceeded from him, dominated him and assimilated him completely. All who ever approached Arthur Meyer, even in his declining years, retain an ineffaceable impression of his tact, subtlety and experience, and of his almost unbelievable luck. Let these excuse his faults and his weaknesses.

He was romantic enough to satisfy any one. His origin was humble and he never attempted to conceal the fact; but from his first appearance in Paris he displayed the most determined will to succeed, allied to a superlative flair and a quite inexplicable social assurance. Things were bound to happen to him.

There was his almost legendary duel with Édouard Drumont, when after several sorties the combatants found themselves almost side by side. Arthur Meyer suddenly seized his adversary's sword with his left hand, and then, with his right, struck him a blow which wounded him severely.

This outrage of all codes produced an immense scandal in Paris. "Gentlemen," said Meyer imperturbably when he returned to the *Gaulois* offices, "it will take a war or a revolution to efface the memory of what I have done."

He seems to have exaggerated a little, however. Three months later he was fined two hundred francs and six months later the whole business was forgotten.

In becoming a partisan of General Boulanger Meyer

forfeited a good deal of Royalist support, and *Le Gaulois* lost nine hundred subscribers. At the time of the Dreyfus case he lost much more than a thousand. But he went on his way all the same, pursuing that moderately Conservative ideal which, as he wrote himself, not without unction, "has enabled me to attend successively the obsequies of Napoleon III, the Prince Imperial, the Comte de Chambord, and the Comte de Paris".

A *florilegium* of Meyer anecdotes could be easily compiled. Here are two which Maurice Talmeyr quotes in his book:

"I asked him one day whether the time had not come for a little plain speaking on the subject of English political manœuvres. He looked at me hesitatingly, reflected awhile, and then said:

"The King was so nice to me when I married. Don't be too hard on England."

On another occasion Maurice Talmeyr heard that a Jewish reporter on *Le Gaulois* had been converted to Christianity, and that a certain eminent society woman was acting as his sponsor.

"So," said Talmeyr, "Pollonair has been baptized?"

"Yes," said Meyer with a sigh. "I quite understand and, in a way, I approve. But he is a little lacking in tact. A man should not get converted before his editor!"

But these stories are legion.

The birth of *La Libre Parole* brought a new personality into the journalistic world, Édouard Drumont, the author of *La France Juive*, with his long hair and beard like an ancient prophet's, and his mystical, ardent expression. In private life this furious revolutionary polemist, this implacable enemy of the things that be, was a courteous and agreeable man who led a comfortable and respectable existence looked after by an old housekeeper Marie who towards the end acquired a remarkable ascendancy over him.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> It was this housekeeper who, during the Panama affair, brought the list of implicated deputies with which de Reinach had tried to bribe *La Libre Parole*, from Drumont in prison and carried it to the printers. (See Chapter viii.)

Édouard Drumont was essentially a student and a bibliophile. He had read everything and was only really happy among his books, in an old fashioned room which recalled to him the purer France of days gone by. It was entirely by chance that he had descended to the hustings, and no one could ever have been more unfitted for the noise and heat. He was a gifted writer but a poor editor; he did not have the gift of assembling either sensational critics or genuine men of letters. The staff of *La Libre Parole* were an inconsiderable and ill-assorted lot, and although Drumont himself had a number of faithful personal friends he never succeeded in creating a group which could impose itself upon the public. The history of *La Libre Parole* adds one more to the sum of those papers which are run by one man only, and as the literary reputation of Drumont grew, so the cause of anti-Semitism declined. Once again the workman had destroyed his own work.

It seems very far from all this back to *Gil Blas*, still nevertheless the wittiest and most typically Parisian of papers. It had left its farcical little offices on the Place de l'Opéra and had taken more sumptuous premises in the rue Gluck, taking over a bankrupt café. There was a magnificent staircase, a large hall and beautiful rooms with painted ceilings. But in spite of all this the director, René d'Hubert, was uneasy:

"I've a feeling that this place is unlucky," he said, glancing his eye around through the inevitable monocle.

It was certainly to prove unlucky to him. Very soon after, he was compelled to resign and leave the direction of the paper to three business men, one of whom, Albiot, a thick-set, olive-skinned Southerner from the Pyrenees, gradually came to occupy the editorial chair.

The paper went on very much the same. The Baron de Vaux still wrote his scandalous *échos* under the signature of Le Diable Boiteux, and the other contributors still continued to function under such period titles as L'Intrépide Vide-Bouteilles, Le Chasseur Solognot, etc. But these old showmen were beginning to manifest signs of wear and tear after so many strenuous years of the gay life

of Paris. What had seemed so dashing and amusing in the days of the Marshal seemed tawdry and frivolous somehow in the more sober era of Félix Faure.

There were a certain number of new men on the staff. Maurice Barrès, always very *grand seigneur* in appearance, Marcel Prevost, Maurice Talmeyr; and the grave face and serious eyes of Jules Bois, the representative of the occult sciences, might also be encountered. The occult was one of the crazes of Paris at the moment, and Jules Bois was its historian.

The self-styled Sar or High Priest of the movement was Joséphin Péladan, who decked himself out in private with vestments of hieratic splendour. Apart from this he was an excellent writer, much under-estimated at the time, and a precursor of many things, notably in the appreciation of Wagner.

Under his auspices the first Rosicrucian *salon* opened in March 1892. Its frequenters were divided into two camps: the initiate who rhapsodized before the mystic paintings of Carlos Schwabe, Jean Delville, and Alphonse Osbert, and the sceptics who came to mock.

Péladan paid no heed to the latter but went on with his various activities. One of these was a revival of ancient liturgical music, which was entirely neglected by the ecclesiastical authorities of the day. In the same month of March 1892 he arranged a performance of the *Messe du Pape Marcel*, sung a *capella* by forty voices. Later on he staged *Babylone*, a piece from his *Théâtre de l'Ame*, whose merit is only just gaining recognition.

In 1892 a new paper was started, one which was to make its proprietor a prodigious fortune from the first.

Fernand Xau, a plain reporter, fired by the great success of the literary journals, first conceived the idea of an organ of the same type, brilliantly edited, open to all young writers and all new opinions, but excluding every trace of politics. Fernand Xau went for his readers to a lower social class than that for which the earlier literary papers had catered. He envisaged them among the lesser civil servants, clerks, and tradesmen, among the better-educated artisans, and, above all, among the women of

the country; for they, with more leisure to read, would be enchanted to possess a paper, not written over their heads but displaying nevertheless a flattering and seductive veneer of culture. The precise nature of this popularization of the literary journal is crystallized in the neutral title chosen for the paper itself—*Le Journal*.

The event triumphantly proved that Fernand Xau was right.

Having secured financial support, Xau scoured Paris for suitable collaborators. His recruiting sergeant was Catulle Mendès, who by his share in the modernization of *Gil Blas* had shown himself to be not without experience in such matters. Underneath his romantic exterior, Catulle Mendès was shrewd, active, and conciliatory; an admirable man for the job. His immense vitality had to spend itself, and he excelled, says Léon Daudet, "in capturing his man by sheer bedazzlement".

Since nobody could resist Catulle Mendès, the staff of *Le Journal* was soon complete. It included François Coppée, Maurice Barrès, and Severine; Octave Mirbeau, always in a rage over something, Georges Courteline, Paul Adam, buried in a cravat like one of his own heroes, with the incredible falsetto of Ernest La Jeunesse dominating the conversation, and the sonorous voices of Émile Bergerat and Georges d'Eparbes chiming in like intermittent gongs.

"Sometimes" (says Léon Daudet again) "a dispute would degenerate into a scuffle, and you would hear a noise like the foundering of a ship with conciliatory voices trying vainly to make themselves heard. Sometimes some crisis or other would bring into the office a whole crowd of idiots, generally in some way connected with the proprietors, hot-foot with the latest scandal overheard in the cafés, which would soon be transformed, with the necessary embellishments, of course, into authentic and exclusive information. The news of the disastrous fire at the Charity Bazaar was brought in thus by Mariéton, but nobody could be induced to believe him. In vain Mariéton multiplied harrowing



circumstantial details, stammering atrociously in his excitement: 'I've just come from C-c-cours la Reine and I saw them b-bringing out the b-b-bodies.'

"'Stop playing the fool,' said somebody at last. 'We have five telephones and a complete news service installed here. If such a thing had happened we should be the first to know.'"<sup>1</sup>

The discomfited Mariéton went out, banging the door behind him. But a little while after newsboys rushed into the streets crying out a special edition of *L'Intransigeant* blazing the news. Fernand Xau, leaping into the air in fury, shrieked aloud to heaven and earth to witness the incompetence of his collaborators. A quarter of an hour after fifty reporters were sent out to cover the town and bring back sensational stories.

Paul Mariéton and his stammer was a standing joke on *Le Journal*, but its outstanding personality was Jean Lorrain. He was then at the height of his popularity. He had made his first appearance some years previously with a series of social and literary portraits in *L'Événement*, which said out aloud what had hitherto only been whispered and gave incontestable proof of their author's powers as a satirist. Gifted with a sure taste and an artist's eye, nobody could have been better equipped to convey those "artistic impressions", the literary legacies of the de Goncourts, so much in favour at the time.

On *Le Journal*, Lorrain's peculiar ubiquitousness, his faculty for seeing everything and saying anything with the confidant nonchalance of a spoiled child, were peculiarly valuable. He always recited his stories before putting them on paper.

"He was" (says Georges Normandy), "essentially a narrator. He had lunched here; discovered a new dish there, or some china somewhere else. He had yawned in somebody's artistic drawing-room or had just been smoking opium in a dive on the Étoile. A fortune-teller had predicted extraordinary things to him; a

<sup>1</sup> Léon Daudet: *L'Entre deux Guerres*. (Paris 1915.)

Duchess had quoted indifferent verse until he almost wept; an acrobat at Olympia had excited his sensual desires, or the poetry of Bataille or Albert Samain his tears of appreciation. . . . ”

In his latter days he conceived a disgust for that life of Paris, swarming with beauty and obscenity together, which once he had loved so much, and turned more and more for solace to the sun-articulated landscape of the South. But if he is remembered now at all, it is in the editorial offices of *Le Journal*, in that feverish hour under the crude artificial light, with his friends all round him—Ernest La Jeunesse, and the beautiful Liane de Pougy with her immense cartwheel hats—an hour in the life of Paris, gone now for ever.

CHAPTER XI  
THE DREYFUS CASE

THE Dreyfus case not only probed the national conscience to the quick; it exercised a considerable and calculable influence upon the evolution of ideas throughout the world. The affair in itself was commonplace enough, but chance ordained that it should gather round it all those elements which naturally make for social disturbance. The honour of the Army and the integrity of the magistracy, the conceptions of justice and injustice, the liberty of the individual conscience, the Jewish question and the conception of patriotism—that is to say the whole foundation of civilized society—were the profound issues before the bar.

How did the case come to assume its furious and disruptive nature, splitting the nation from end to end into two camps?

We can now see that this passion which it aroused is one of the most reassuring as well as the most exciting of spectacles; for a nation which can display so much energy and fury in dealing with conceptions of such fundamental importance gives an incontestable proof of its dynamic force. Can we say so much of France to-day? Should we be found capable of this same passion for a set of moral ideals? We should like to think it, but we cannot venture to assert it. In 1898 we were not yet supine under that appalling tyranny of materialism which weighs upon us now like a leaden shroud. Those who fought each other then possessed the inner liberty of being able to give themselves to and for their dreams, and because of that this fratricidal war is not without beauty.

It would not be possible to trace in detail the development of this moral revolution. Our province is to note its effect on public opinion as the drama unrolled. From this standpoint it lasted very much more than two years, for although the actual events took place in the years 1898 and 1899, their repercussions could be felt throughout

the years which led up to the great war of 1914. Like the Panama affair, but on an infinitely greater scale the Dreyfus case embittered and poisoned public and political life in France for ten years or more.

For the general public the point of departure was Zola's famous letter "J'Accuse" which appeared in *L'Aurore* on January 13th, 1898. The preceding stages had been only very roughly and imperfectly comprehended by the man in the street. He vaguely remembered that an officer named Dreyfus had been sentenced for espionage towards the end of 1894. He had also, equally vaguely, heard of some dispute between the two colonels Picquart and Henry, but the affair had been virtually forgotten until *Figaro* began to agitate for a re-trial. Gradually the whole case was brought back into the limelight and feeling began to rise until the acquittal of Esterhazy unloosed the first tumult. But above all the clamour from various quarters, interested and disinterested, thundered the loud voice of Émile Zola from one end of the country to the other: "J'Accuse!"

It proved to be the gong that released the combatants. Advocates and opponents of the revision began to face up.

"The cleavage was the work of a minute" (says M. Daniel Halévy<sup>1</sup>) "among the politically-minded classes, which alone were capable of grasping all the details and facets of so involved and far-reaching an affair, each family had taken up its position, decided upon its tactics, and entrenched itself behind closed doors. For Paris no less than medieval Florence has its family feuds, and its unembattlemented houses shelter no less warlike factions. The minds of the French reverted instinctively to the classic formation: authoritarian or libertarian, faithful and heretic."

Everybody enrolled in one camp or the other and no one ever changed sides. All were driven equally by the same passion. Paris was no place for the sceptical, the contemptuous, or the tolerant.

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Halévy: *Luttes et Problèmes*.

During the whole duration of the legal proceedings against Zola the court was like a battlefield. Only those who actually saw the crowd surging round its precincts and shared in its tense, excited movement, can have any idea of the feeling aroused. Heavily reinforced guards of police and soldiers were drafted in to keep back the people. It was a continual demonstration, men coming and going, haranguing here and gesticulating there, burning newspapers of the opposing faction, shouting "*Vive Zola!*" or "*Vive l'Armée!*", cheering or hissing the arrivals, and threatening a stampede at any moment.

Inside the court the excitement was scarcely better controlled. The counsel, the magistrates, and the protagonists almost came to blows, and the corridor reserved for magistrates and jurors was so crowded that the President of the Court could scarcely make his way through. Zola would have been literally torn to pieces were it not for the faithful and stalwart bodyguard which always surrounded him, and the ushers of the court were powerless to prevent the scuffles and uproars which were continually taking place.

This state of affairs lasted throughout the entire proceedings, and it was naturally not alleviated when the verdict went against Zola. The news ran through the cafés and the streets like wildfire, and feeling became so acute that partnerships, friendships, and even homes were ruptured by it.

But the revolution—for such it was—remained still a constitutional one. It was content to wait on the tardy hands of legal justice without rushing to the rifle and the barricade. Its havoc was in the realm of the spirit.

The extraordinary conversions made by the "*Affaire*" are a striking proof of this. We have already mentioned that of *Figaro*, which, following its director's convictions and at enormous cost both to its circulation and its prestige, espoused the Dreyfusard cause. Other notable converts were Jules Cornely and Francis de Pressensé, the archetype of conservative Frenchmen, who was always accusing others of being too lenient with the advanced factions. Pressensé, although a Protestant, was very

highly thought of in Catholic circles because of his panegyric on Cardinal Manning. But the best known of all these dramatic conversions was that of Zola's greatest literary enemy, the ironic sceptic who was to become a thurifer of the new religion. It was strange to see Anatole France at the Dreyfusard meetings, listening eagerly to burning speeches whose violent rhodomontade would once have provoked his most contemptuous smiles.

The opposing camp could show spectacles just as ironic. François Coppée, the charming—almost too charming—lyricist of the poor and humble, had become transported by martial fervour and sounded a clarion call for the honour of the French General Staff.

But the man whom the affair transformed most completely was Jules Lemaître. The scholarly, rather sceptical man of letters became almost overnight the man of action and the leader of a political party.

The progress of the affair is like that of a film scenario, where incident succeeds incident and alarm follows alarm, keeping the audience all the time at fever pitch. From the suicide of Colonel Henry events followed each other with bewildering rapidity; ministries rose and fell; intrigues multiplied and Press campaigns raged on either hand. Everybody who in any way, however remotely, was connected with the business found the current of his life interrupted. Some people even grew rather tired of it.

"It's all very serious," said a caricature of the period. "D'you suppose it will be very much talked about a thousand years hence?"

Each camp, of course, had its own caricaturists, but the Nationalist Party, by virtue of the adherence of Forain, was easily the best equipped. That savage pencil, whose wit and cruelty have seldom been surpassed, drew blistering pictures for the *Écho de Paris*, and later on for his own paper, *P'stt*, whose title cried in the streets often induced passers-by to stop, turn round, and, inevitably, purchase it.

The principal artistic luminary of the Dreyfusard camp was Hermann-Paul, who founded *Le Sifflet*, a journal

which its sellers joyously hawked with ear-piercing whistles. But he was no Forain.

Among the seething cast of characters there were some who remained on the stage till the end. The counsel were the same throughout. Predominant among them was Labori, a blond ox of a man with a loud voice and vigorous gestures, like a boxer at the Bar, a likeness heightened by the way he wore his hair low on the forehead in a sort of fringe. He flung himself into the case with all his reserves of ardour, and he never weakened or gave in until the day when an assassin removed him.

By his side was a figure contrasting in every respect. Me Demange was the typical decorous and respected lawyer, a man of weight whose opinions carried authority.

"His speeches" (says Maurice Talmeyr) "were like those melodious and sonorous organ preludes which gradually draw in all the other instruments, from the hautboy to the trombone, and fill the vast cathedral with a majestic and awe-inspiring volume of sound."

Labori and he were admirable complements, and together they formed a combination which could easily outclass any team which their opponents could put up.

The politicians whose names recur most often to the mind, after Ranc and Scheurer-Kestner, the real pillars of the revision, are Clemenceau, then at the top of his man-eating form, Joseph Reinach, the pope of the Dreyfusards, Cavaignac, who achieved the summit of parliamentary success in a month and was compelled to resign a few weeks later, Delcassé and Waldeck-Rousseau, who put the finishing touch to the affair.

The writers were perhaps more involved in things than any one. Émile Zola was for two years certainly the best hated man in France; his life was threatened continually, infernal machines were posted to him, and he was the subject of shoals of fulminating letters, insulting cartoons, and every form of abuse.

Maurice Barrès, with his *Scènes et Doctrines du Nationalisme*, continued in his role of eyewitness, but Urbain

Gohier, Severine and Jules Lemaître on one side, Édouard Drumont and Henri Rochefort on the other, were in the thick of the fray. The two chief organs of opinion were *L'Aurore*, the official mouthpiece of the Dreyfusards, and the *Écho de Paris*, the upholder of the military authorities. To these magnetic poles were drawn all the pens and all the passions in their respective camps.

The death of Félix Faure, which occurred at the beginning of 1890, came as a considerable shock to a public opinion strained almost to breaking point. It was hailed with joy by the Dreyfusards, who had always seen an enemy in the defunct President, and it was a source of great satisfaction to Clemenceau since it enabled him once more to rig a Presidential election. "There goes a man who will not be missed," he wrote in *L'Aurore*, announcing the death of the President to his readers, and his article concluded with the rallying cry, "Vote for Loubet." This was quite enough to set the whole of the Nationalist camp against the new nominee, and Parisians looked forward to scenes of considerable liveliness.

They were not disappointed. All along the route by which Loubet was to pass on his way to the Elysée after his election were lined bands of Nationalists and anti-Semites. As soon as the unhappy Loubet appeared he was greeted with hisses, catcalls and shouts of "Resign!", "Down with Loubet!" and "Up, the Army!" while around his carriage swarmed men surging forward with cries of "Hang him!" "Throw him in the river!" It was only with the greatest difficulty that the police managed to get him to the Elysée safe and whole.

That night the streets of Paris swarmed as if another revolution had broken out. Bands of the opposing factions were everywhere coming to blows, and beneath the statue of Joan of Arc a massed meeting of the League of Patriots was being addressed by Paul Déroulède. Despite the lateness of the hour, a huge and quivering crowd hung on his burning voice as he launched the call to arms, bidding the people to come out in their thousands and support him at the late President's funeral procession, "when the real criminals of the Court of Cassation will



pass in front of your eyes." Men went away with the conviction that something sensational was about to happen.

The sensational happening became suddenly transmuted into farce. After the funeral ceremonies Déroulède rushed up to General Roget, seized hold of his bridle and cried: "March on the Elysée, General. Take pity on France." The General, extremely irritated, repulsed Déroulède, and a riot ensued from which the troops eventually managed to extricate Déroulède and Hubert, taking them to the barracks for shelter. In due course an officer appeared and informed the excited tribunes, pacing up and down the Salle d'Honneur, that so far as General Roget was concerned they were free to go.

"Free!" screamed Déroulède. "Not even arrested!"

The real gravity of the incident was inevitably swallowed up in the ludicrous aspect, and Paris quickly forgot about it. Public opinion was much more excited three months later, when at the Auteuil Steeplechases the Baron de Christiani raised his walking-stick to assault the President of the Republic. This ill-advised attack reawakened the old hatred of the nobility, always dormant in the Parisian working classes, and instigated a mass demonstration on the day of the Longchamps Grand Prix.

From early dawn a procession of workmen, students, clerks, and small tradesmen, all with red buttonholes and with sticks and cudgels in their hands, marched in mass formation towards the Bois de Boulogne, making for Longchamps, singing the "Internationale" as they went. It might have had very grave consequences, and it was directly provoked by the stupid and ill-judged action of the Baron de Christiani, another example of that incurable lack of political sagacity which seems always to dog the Right.

While all these things were happening the Dreyfus case was still dragging on. It had lasted eighteen months when the decree of the Court of Cassation revoked the condemnation and ordered Dreyfus to be re-tried by the Court Martial at Rennes. Popular excitement broke out again, and the second trial and condemnation of Dreyfus

to ten years' imprisonment reanimated all the fires of partisan fury and personal rancour. Once again the country seemed to be almost on the brink of civil war, when the President of the Republic, exercising his prerogative, released Dreyfus from his sentence. "The incident is now closed," said the Minister of War jokingly. It was not, however, closed for Dreyfus until five years later when the Court of Cassation definitely acquitted and reinstated him.

The year 1889 was a dramatic one for the stormy petrels of direct action. On August 12th the Government arrested Déroulède and several other prominent Royalists and anti-Semites for conspiracy against the State—a decision which provoked the famous "siege of Fort Chabrol".

Jules Guérin, the leader of the anti-Semite league, for whose arrest a warrant had been issued, barricaded himself in the offices of his paper *L'Anti Juif* in the rue de Chabrol and refused to give himself up to the police. With him were a number of his followers, "armed to the teeth", it was said, and anyhow fully prepared to offer a desperate resistance.

Not wishing to cause any bloodshed, the Government decided to put a cordon of troops round the improvised fort and starve out the occupants.

The building became the cynosure of Paris. Crowds waited round to catch a glimpse of Jules Guérin, who occasionally appeared at the windows or on the roof, while Lépine, the Prefect of Police, came several times a day to give instructions. This comedy lasted for thirty-seven days, at the end of which Lucien Millevoye negotiated the raising of the siege and Jules Guérin was arrested.

The arrested Nationalists came before the Court in November, and once again passions ran high in the Chamber and in the streets. Guérin was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, André Buffet, Lur-Saluces, and Déroulède to ten years' banishment from France. This time it seemed as though France was sated with political and social crises. Luckily the Exhibition of 1910 was at

hand to turn men's mind to other things, and they turned with the immense alacrity of relief.

. . . . .

We have said that the ravages of the Dreyfus affair extended into almost every department of the national life. It was not to be expected that the social world would escape the hurricane. Feeling ran as high in the drawing-rooms as elsewhere, and there were in the beginning stories of ludicrous and undignified scenes where hostesses, outraged by the aggressive or differing opinions expressed by their guests, turned on them with unconcealed fury, while well-trained domestics reiterated plaintively that dinner was served.

The two "official" *salons* of the opposing parties are well worth a sketch. The first was that of Madame Arman de Caillavet, the centre of Dreyfusism, whose bright particular star was Anatole France. The other was the house of Madame de Loynes, which was the fortress of nationalism with Jules Lemaître as uncrowned king.

Madame Arman de Caillavet had lived for many years in the beautiful house on the avenue Roche where a brilliant assembly of literary men and cultivated people generally forgathered every Sunday. Chosen intimates also dined on Wednesdays.

The hostess was a woman of very unusual intellectual calibre. She was an admirable judge of men, but could conceal her opinions when it suited her. She had a ready wit, and she knew how to dominate an assembly. She was a faithful friend, faithful in the distinctively masculine fashion. There was, indeed, something definitely masculine in her make-up. M. André Maurel testifies that there was nothing feminine in her intellectual processes.

"She judged and appraised things exactly like a man. She had a sure taste in art and her culture was immensely catholic, save that she did not appreciate music, which she held to be lacking in logic and precision. Whenever emotion was exalted to the place of reason she instinctively retired."

She was a purely eighteenth-century type who might have sat at the feet of Voltaire.

By the side of such a woman a husband would necessarily play a subordinate part. But the high spirits and exuberance of M. Arman prevented him from being entirely overlooked. He was a big, jovial man, rather given to buffoonery, whose unconventional manners and loud jokes sometimes scandalized those who met him for the first time. He cultivated indiscretions and malicious nicknames, which he would launch out into a room regardless of his audience. Most people thought him a little crude, but he was actually much more subtle than he appeared.

The Sunday receptions were invariably very crowded.

"Fifty or more people would be gathered in the drawing-room" (says M. Maurel) "mostly round Madame Arman, whose favourite seat was an armchair by the mantelpiece; but this vantage-point was not easily maintained since the fireplace was on the short side of the room and was quite near the door through which newcomers came in. You always had to be moving on to let somebody pass by, but nobody would have renounced his uncomfortable position for a kingdom."

Whoever else might be there attention was always centred on Anatole France. He never came down until the room was full, when Madame Arman sent a message upstairs, where he would probably be talking to her husband. Then the master would deign to make his appearance.

Everything had been carefully stage-managed for him, everything devised at once to flatter and amuse him. Women came to offer adulation like incense, men eminent in all walks of life to exchange ideas with him and to expand in his unique intellectual atmosphere. No Oriental satrap or despot was ever more solicitously served than he by Madame Arman: no man's inner and secret self was ever more completely and profoundly understood.

In return he brought her the lustre of his presence and a share of the homage so freely bestowed on him.

There he held court, but at the bottom of his heart he was singularly contemptuous of all who came. But it gave him sardonic pleasure to assume the most enthusiastic appreciation of them. He would kiss the women's hands with false flattery, dropping honeyed words of compliment with incomparable art into their bemused ears. He would deliberately magnify the importance and the status of his listeners, it would be "My dear sir . . . our contemporary Raphael . . ." "our future Talma". He loved to roll the titles of dignitaries and officials on his tongue: it was always "Your Excellency", "My dear Senator", and so on. Out of malice? Perhaps. But fundamentally out of a genuine romantic taste for power and glory, and an essential archaism.

The wit which has been quoted so often was not always spontaneous. He loved to play around an idea, pursuing it, embroidering it, before he finally decided to launch the famous epigram. One of his paradoxical tastes was to affect to despise originality in writers, maintaining that it was a purely secondary quality in their equipment. When J. H. Rosny said to him one day:

"That's a good bit of local colour in your Homer—'Don't spit in the rivers for they are sacred,'" France replied:

"It ought to be. I got it out of Hesiod."

On another occasion when a fulsome admirer was congratulating him upon a certain anecdote he said:

"Yes, it's good. It comes from an Italian author." And he added: "Heaven knows I'm just as capable of inventing anecdotes as anybody else, but it irritates me. I prefer to reassure myself by using one that has served already. At least I know that somebody has found it acceptable."

One day a guest showed an antique cameo ring for the great man's admiration.

"Whose head do you think it is?" asked the possessor anxiously.

"Well, whose do you want it to be?" asked France.

From the early days of his education by the Jesuits he had cherished an animosity against the Church, and whenever he found himself at table with an ecclesiastical dignitary he would always adopt an unctuous tone and pontifical gestures, while drawing recklessly upon his store of voluptuous knowledge and experience for the discomfiture of his clerical listener.

How could the man who wrote that all men love injustice, the sceptic who held it to be a fundamental necessity of human society, come to range himself with the Dreyfusards? The conversion was probably due to Madame Arman, but M. Maurel attributes it largely to the influence of Jean Jaurès, who was among the frequenters of the house.

"The wide culture and intellectual force of the tribune struck a response from the eclectic knowledge and innate boredom of the writer. The integrity of the one aroused the generosity of the other, and the sauvity of France knew exactly how to temper and adapt the rough directness of the tribune. I don't think I am wrong in attributing mainly to Jaurès the revolutionary orientation of France's later life. It is incontestable that from the time of their meeting the rather supercilious dilettante, the sceptic whose malleable spirit lacked the essential iron of conviction, became not merely the most violent of the Dreyfusards, but a sympathizer with all the most extreme revolutionary ideas."

The Arman de Caillavet *salon* inevitably followed its leading light and thus became the most active centre of Dreyfusard propaganda. Every Sunday the tone grew warmer, and every Sunday found Anatole France more firmly entrenched in his extreme opinions. Soon he yearned to proclaim them on some more congruous stage than a drawing-room full of worldly and wealthy dilettanti, and so he decided to mount the platform at the Socialist public meetings and address the people.

The new recruit was received with acclamation. He

made a picturesque convert, the author of *Thais* humbly approaching his poor, unlettered brethren. His reputation lent a certain amount of welcome prestige to the extreme Socialists and for two years he was the star performer at Belleville and Vaugirard.

It is probable that Madame Arman did not view these later peregrinations of her hero with any too favourable an eye, but so far as the Dreyfus case itself was concerned her partisanship never abated in ardour.

There were two other women who brought almost equal enthusiasm to the cause: Madame Émile Strauss and Madame Ménard Dorian.

Madame Strauss lived on the Boulevard Haussmann, opposite the statue of Shakespeare, a low-ceilinged apartment where the light barely filtered in through the smoky atmosphere of Paris. She was a daughter of Halévy, the composer of *La Juive*, and the widow of Bizet, whom she had married for love. Her *salon* was naturally much frequented by artistic and theatrical people, and it was very characteristically Parisian. She was very cultured but with no trace of pedantry, beautiful, pleasantly sentimental, and with a gift for launching epigrams and promoting conversation. And she had the supreme social gift of interesting herself in those who came to see her; she contrived in some way to follow all their activities and to make herself essential to them. And so her rooms were always crowded, and by many of the socially elect.

“Every facet of Parisian life was represented there” (says Madame de Clermont Tonnerre). “There would be Forain talking to Meilhac, who generally arrived for dinner with a long string of shoe-lace dangling (he was too fat to tie them up himself). He was full of his discovery of the city’s latest charmer, Liane de Pougy, whom he had taken out to dinner. Others who came frequently were the young Marcel Proust, Georges de Porto-Riche, Simone Le Bargy, Réjane—bringing all the gossip of Paris piping hot from the Ministry, the newspaper offices, and of course and above all, from the theatres.”

Madame Strauss handled such an assembly to perfection, and would always be found in the centre of attraction, turning one of the phrases for which she was famous.

It was she who remarked to a friend flaunting a recent decoration: "A woman's breast was not made for medals," and of a mature beauty growing very substantial in her decline: "She is more than a statue; she is almost a group."

On the day when Dreyfus was convicted Madame Strauss went into mourning, and the heat of the controversy which raged round her was such as to cause breaches with many of her friends. But she stood up against the storm and retained a bodyguard of the faithful, knowing perfectly well that the disaffected would return to her in due course. Everything dies down some day, even an *Affaire Dreyfus*, but for a long time the calm of the social reunions in the flat on the Boulevard Haussmann was severely shaken.

So also was that of another famous hostess, Madame Menard Dorian, a charming creature with a lively intellectual curiosity who had always inclined to extreme views, Socialism, anti-clericalism, and the entire freedom of the individual. It may be imagined that her drawing-room echoed to the wildest alarms and excursions during the famous case, drawing professional righters of wrongs from all over Europe, ardent spirits to whom Dreyfus was Christ and Zola his prophet.

Enthroned like a god among these dervish dancers of free thought was the interdicted Colonel Picquart, "the angel of the revision", as his less restrained admirers called him. He was a pleasant-looking man with a rather prominent nose and a gentle expression. Time was to prove him lacking in the genius with which he had been so superabundantly credited, but his distinguished manners, conversational gifts and undeniable culture kept him upon the pedestal which, it must be admitted, he occupied modestly enough.

This same man, on the other side of the spiritual barricade, was vilified and execrated by thousands. And nowhere more than in the central temple of the Nationalist priesthood, the *salon* of Madame de Loynes.



After the war of 1870 a young officer, the bearer of a very distinguished and honourable name, the Count de Loynes, had left the Army and married the fiancée and heiress of a friend killed in battle. The marriage was not a happy one; grievances and dissensions multiplied, and at last the parties separated. The Comtesse de Loynes returned to her girlhood home in the rue de l'Arcade, and, having considerable social ambitions, began to entertain largely. She was beautiful, with a clear and lovely face and deep eyes under high arched brows. She wore her hair swathed in two huge coils and bore a striking resemblance to the famous Rachel.

Her beauty was equalled by her culture, her intelligence, and her real distinction of character. All those who knew her testified to her loyalty and her worth. She had that instinctive and unlearnable charm and tact without which no woman can ever preside over a *salon*, and she had always known almost every important figure in the political and literary worlds. After her separation from her husband all her friends rallied round her—Clemenceau, Porto-Riche, Deschanel (very young then), Ernest Daudet, Blowitz, correspondent to the London *Times* and very well informed on everything, Henry Houssaye and André Maurel, who has left the most touching and graceful souvenir of the circle where he first learnt the social round.

She received every day between five and seven, a routine which would seem insufferable to hostesses to-day. But such assiduity was necessary then if you wanted to make your house a *salon*. It was the classic tradition of the eighteenth century, and it was that hoary survivor of the great days, Émile de Girardin, who had impressed upon the Countess the necessity of following it.

The story of the first meeting of the Comtesse de Loynes and Jules Lemaître is a romantic one. He was then a rather awkward young provincial just arrived in Paris and he asked Madame Arman de Caillavet to get him a ticket for one of Arsène Houssaye's balls.

There he encountered a charming mask in heliotrope who excited him by the most stimulating conversation.

Taken by storm, he passed the whole evening in her company, and a day or so later, when lunching with Madame Arman he was still extolling the incognita's wit and charm. Piqued by curiosity about the woman who would not give her name, he besought Arsène Houssaye to supply it.

"Give me till to-morrow," said the latter, "and I'll take you to her."

And so on the following day Jules Lemaître went to see Madame de Loynes, and for twenty years he remained by her side.

These two were made to understand each other. As Arthur Meyer said: "There could never have been an association between them, nothing less than a union . . ."

Very quickly Jules Lemaître acquired the habit of spending all his time with the Countess. He dined on Fridays, of course, also on Sundays, a day reserved for relatives and her most intimate friends.

Almost identical as were their tastes, Jules Lemaître did not, in the beginning, share all his friend's enthusiasms for certain individuals. Like all women, Madame de Loynes admired success and was always ready to entertain the notorious. And so it happened that at the same table where Clemenceau used to sit (sat still in fact, though not at the same time), Madame de Loynes would entertain General Boulanger, to the intense disgust of Lemaître, who couldn't bear him.

At that particular period Jules Lemaître was the orthodox bourgeois Liberal, essentially though not ostentatiously sceptical, and a convinced Republican above all. He sneered at the black horse and the Boulangist legend as mere cabaret heroics, a pantomime fantasia drawn by Caran d'Ache. It was a long time before Madame de Loynes could induce him to modify his political opinions, but the return of Déroulède from Italy and the resumption of their acquaintance ultimately had the desired effect. Lemaître and Déroulède had visited museums together and discovered a number of mutual enthusiasms, and their friendship ripened rapidly under the approving eye of Madame de Loynes.

Then Jules Lemaître came to regret that he had not

thrown himself into the Boulangist movement. "It was a genuine national movement," he said, "and I should not have held aloof." A little later on the condemnation of Rochefort for some unusual outspokenness revived his old Republican indignation, but the Panama affair really converted him. From the disclosures of that sordid jobbery he reverted absolutely and finally to the Nationalist camp.

When the Dreyfus affair came to a head the *salon* of Madame de Loynes divided sharply into two camps. She had just installed herself in new quarters on the avenue des Champs-Élysées, and in order to be near her, Jules Lemaître had also moved a little way off. He lunched with her every day, not a line of his was written for publication without she saw it first, not a situation in a play without it had been exhaustively discussed between them. They were, in fact, collaborators.

Almost immediately Madame de Loynes, which is to say Jules Lemaître, took command of the anti-Dreyfusard camp. He left *Figaro* for the *Écho de Paris*, where, always under the auspices of the lady, he commenced his violent attacks on the revisionists. As the months drew on and the affair became more and more involved and extensive the idea of forming an actual political party began to take shape in his mind.

One might say that the Patrie Française League was actually founded in the *salon* of Madame de Loynes. Its moving spirits were François Coppée and Jules Lemaître; Maurice Barrès, Brunetière, Cavaignac, and Colonel Monteil were active supporters, and a number of the younger men were drawn in.

Their first public meeting was on January 19th 1899 and more than fifteen hundred people were present. François Coppée spoke first, followed by Jules Lemaître.

Every one wondered whether Madame de Loynes would be there. She sat in a box, the only one the hall boasted, with her faithful companion, Mlle Pauline, and all heads were turned in her direction as the whisper ran round: "Yes, it is." "It is she."

Madame de Loynes did not consider that the time had now come for her to retire from the stage; on the contrary,

she knew that her advice and counsel were never more necessary. She was a woman who knew how to listen and how to weigh up and make use of what she heard.

"If ever you discussed in her presence" (said Léon Daudet) "anything or anybody of which or of whom she had exceptional knowledge and understanding, she always had the sense to refrain from joining in. She was a woman to the finger-tips, and she remained feminine in all discussions, but it was a penetrating femininity which no compliment could deflect. Many of those who considered themselves the shrewdest of people often burnt their fingers through not listening to her advice, and a man like Syveton, who despised, or affected to despise, all women, consulted her often and openly praised her common sense. She was ready for any situation and any circumstances."

The new Nationalist Party was now launched in a fair wind, and its success at the municipal elections seemed to presage a triumph in the parliamentary ones later on. Jules Lemaître rushed from one public meeting to another, working himself to death, but so intoxicated by the applause of the crowd that he could not bring himself to forgo it. It was late before he could get back to report to Madame de Loynes, weary, dishevelled but entirely happy in his new career.

We all know how ill-founded his hopes proved to be. The election of 1902 was a disastrous defeat for his new party. On the night of the poll, Madame de Loynes, with Lemaître, Judet and Léon Daudet, sat inside the Café de la Paix, through the windows of which they could read the illuminated results outside the office of the *Écho de Paris*. The Place de l'Opéra was overflowing with people, Nationalists and Republicans about equally represented, so that each result was greeted with an outburst of cheers from one side and catcalls and hisses from the other. Paris had gone mad with political fever during the election, but even the most sanguine adherent of the new party felt that something had been irretrievably smashed that night.

"It was Madame de Loynes who rallied us" (continues Léon Daudet), "reminding us that, in the words of Tacitus, it is not necessary to succeed but to persevere. How I admired her firm optimism, her strength of character, her indomitable belief in the country's destiny. Then we went out, picking our way through the crowd to the League's Central Offices in the rue de Gramont. There we found Cavaignac, Coppée, and the rest of them, gloomily opening the telegrams announcing the provincial results. What long and discomfited faces. . . ."

The decline of Jules Lemaître's great work began from that night and progressed to its inevitable eclipse.

Madame de Loynes held out till the end; her faith was never dimmed, and until the last she rallied and heartened the Leaguers. But as her political hopes declined, she turned more and more to literature for refuge. Once again her house became the great literary rendezvous of Paris, a neutral territory where the friends and foes of yesterday could rest and take breath. Her undoubted influence on the elections to the Academy brought the aspiring and the ambitious once more around her; once again she entertained indefatigably—to luncheons, dinners, receptions. The thunder of political strife echoed no longer within those gracious, illustrious walls, and when at last she died it seemed as though a peculiarly French tradition of culture had passed away for ever.

## CHAPTER XII

### FRANCE DISCOVERS SPORT

of the period following all these upheavals we can best say briefly that France was learning to get used to her new masters. We have repeatedly and designedly stressed the rapidity of social developments once the departure of President MacMahon removed the last remaining properties of the Second Empire theatre. But France had barely had time to become used to the façade of the new régime before a disquieting series of lessons revealed its insecurity and its imperfections. Such anti-parliamentary reactions as Boulangism and the *Ligue de la Patrie Française* were fundamentally, as we have said, expressions of public disgust at the spectacle.

But mercifully human life is not entirely centred round parliaments. Political crises may agitate a nation for ten years or more, may provoke anti-parliamentary reactions on the one hand and extreme revolutionary tendencies on the other; governments may lean frenziedly this way and that way for support, but the man in the street will find time to think of other things. And pre-eminently among the other things, during the stormy years we have been considering, France succumbed to the lure of sport.

When? No general dates can be given. Tennis was introduced in France about 1878; football in 1880. The first golf club of Paris had been founded earlier, in 1851, but the game did not become popular until much later. Gymnastics, of course, have always been with us, but it was about 1890 that the Swedish system, with its regularity of method and scientific teaching, was first introduced. The historic sports, horse-racing, running, swimming, and boating were as popular as ever, but the joys of winter sports were unknown save to a select few down to the end of the century.

It was not, of course, that sport was ever "discovered". What we mean by the phrase is the public attention and emphasis bestowed upon it of late years, and the social

cult which has made it the national craze. All this was accomplished in ten years. Between 1885 and 1895 France passed definitely from the category of non-sporting nations into that of the sporting ones. And the particular sport which made the fashion and worked the miracle was—bicycling.

“The bicycle” (says J. H. Rosny, senior) “is very much more than a social novelty; it is one of the greatest events which have occurred in the history of the human race. It may be that the discoveries of fire, of writing and of printing were intrinsically more important, but it is certain that the slow-moving quadruped who sacrificed his forefeet to become man and climb over the world, has in one stroke become the swiftest-moving of them all. The significance of such a fact is incalculable. I will not here develop the thesis that bicycling was the first stage in the evolution of aviation, since it taught man to preserve his equilibrium almost in space, and taught his eye to range as alertly as a hawk’s.”<sup>1</sup>

The credit for introducing the bicycle to the French public belongs to a journalist, Pierre Giffard. With the reporter’s passion for novelty he had been writing, under the title of “Jean Sans Terre” a series of articles in the *Petit Journal* at the beginning of 1890, enthusiastically describing a new mode of locomotion which he regarded as a paramount social benefit. The writer’s simple and practical matter, allied to a pleasant style, ensured the success of his campaign. He enumerated the advantages of this little machine that veritably gave wings to man and which bestowed upon him the privilege of rapid movement at the cost of a very slight muscular effort. He proclaimed that the bicycle was the true chariot of democracy, the means by which the workman could escape from the town in his spare time and spend a few hours with nature. He prophesied that it would become equally indispensable to the peasant, and to the land-owner; he foresaw an illimitable future for the little

<sup>1</sup> *Un autre monde.* (Plon.)

mechanical fairy which could so multiply the powers of man.

Such vigorous and prolonged publicity could not fail to popularize the invention. From being almost unnoticed in the Exhibition of 1889 the bicycle soon began to attract more and more attention, until it was the topic of all tongues and the cynosure of all eyes. It was not then a thing of beauty. Its lines were inharmonious, its handle-bar enormous, and the wheels tyred with solid rubber did little to absorb the shocks of the road. But for all that it was so simple and practical and so easy to steer that Pierre Giffard found thousands of disciples in a very short time.

But before the social success of the "little steel fairy" could be assured, it was necessary for some well-known personage to make it the fashion, to patronize it in broad daylight before the eyes of Paris. Who could have been more suitable for this role than the Prince de Sagan, the king of fashion and the arbiter of Parisian taste.

On that particular day there was only one topic of conversation among all the riders and promenaders in the Bois, and it began like this:

"'Have you seen the Prince?'"

"'No, not yet!'"

"'Well, he's riding a bicycle down the Ponière walk.'"

"'Nonsense, he couldn't possibly!'"

And those who had not seen him with their own eyes started their horses off at a gallop to the said walk to see if the news was true.

There was no mistake. There he was, in a most striking suit, crowned by a straw hat of entirely individual shape.

From that time on to be smart you had to bicycle. A number of the elect united to form a Bicycling Club. It was called the Omnium, and its first president of committee was the Duc d'Uzès.

People soon began to feel the need of a periodical entirely devoted to the absorbing subject, and this was met,





THE BICYCLING CRAZE, 1896



in 1891, by the appearance of the *Cycle*, to which was later added, *La Bicyclette*. Then the indefatigable Pierre Giffard launched *Le Vélo*, a daily sheet which grew more and more enthusiastic with every issue. The army of devotees was recruited from all classes, and it now seems, judging from their subsequent pæans, that the literary folk were among the earliest to be converted.

"The beauty of the bicycle" (said Maurice Le Blanc) "resides in its sincerity. It conceals nothing. All its workings are open and visible and proclaim aloud their end, which is to go quickly, lightly and quietly. There is a genuine aesthetic emotion to be derived from the bicycle, a new artistic gratification in watching these pretty little racing animals whose every detail proclaims their purpose. What more symbolic of speed than those two equal wheels, their spokes, distended and quivering like the veritable nerves of a body, two infinite and eternal legs without beginning or end? What more eloquent of stability and security than that lean and vigorous skeleton, those handle-bars, like reins of steel, and that whole muscular mechanism so logical and so fit? It is from this double conception of security and speed that the inner harmony of the bicycle derives a profound and indisputable beauty of logic."<sup>1</sup>

The Bois de Boulogne inevitably became the meeting-place of all the most fervent adherents of the pedal. Early in the morning they might be seen circling rapidly round the lakes and flying down the alleys. They included such people as Jules Lemaître, Tristan Bernard, Marcel Prevost, Henry Bataille, and Octave Mirbeau among the literary lights, and men about town and idlers by the hundred, all rapturously sitting astride on the little steel horses and circling round and round. It was a folly, a craze, a mania. But then it was the fashion!

Some of the more timid learned to ride in private, but the great majority essayed their prowess in broad daylight from the first. Always in the Bois, and generally along

<sup>1</sup> Maurice le Blanc: *Voici des Ailes*.

the road that connects the Dauphiné and Maillot gates, or else in the circular drives which start out from the latter. Here might be found a whole school of peripatetic professors, all ready to give lessons and advice for a consideration. There were even some who would give it gratis, especially when a charming female form appeared in the distance.

For the women had fallen for it from the beginning. It gave them an excellent opportunity to keep an eye on their masculine possessions; they were free of all the roads of France. But the question of a suitable costume weighed heavily upon them, very literally when they essayed to ride in their trailing voluminous skirts.

If the long skirt could not be accommodated to the little flying fairy, very well then, the long skirt must go. There were two alternatives: they could wear a shorter skirt or come out boldly in the ample breeches which all the men who rode had adopted from the beginning.

This was the turning-point in the evolution of feminine dress. The exigencies of modern life, transformed by mechanical inventions, had imposed themselves suddenly and ruthlessly upon the classic garments of the opposite sex. A sartorial tradition was challenged; it was soon to be overthrown entirely.

The first essays in emancipated garments for women were not aesthetically successful. It was the general opinion that the women in their bicycling breeches lost all their grace and looked dumpy and cut-down. In any case, such visions in 1896 provoked, as may be imagined, unflattering and indignant comments from several points of view.

From a correspondence of the period to which several prominent women were invited to contribute we have culled the following:

Madame Cibberna wrote ironically:

"It seems that it is exquisite to eat up space, crouched over two wheels with your back bent, your arms rigid and your eyes so glued to the handle-bars that you dare not look at the landscape. It seems that it is divine to

scorch along the great open roads being successively or simultaneously grilled by the sun, suffocated by the wind, blinded by the dust and soaked through with rain. Apparently nobody who has not experienced these delights is qualified to say a word on the subject."

Madame Édouard Adam almost snorted with indignation:

"Bicycling women in breeches. As if there aren't enough calves on view any day in the streets of Paris. I consider that knee-breeches are worse than immodest: they are ridiculous."

Mlle Wanda de Boneza was quite pontifical:

"Bicycling is unthinkable as a sport for a woman with any pretensions to charm. It is essentially unfeminine."

Madame Bréval said:

"Only the long skirt with its flowing folds sweeping down into harmonious waves can enable us to preserve, either in private life or on the stage, a dignified appearance before the eyes of men."

"I am all for breeches," cried, on the contrary, Mlle Marthe Darthy of the Opera. And Marguerite Deval said the same. Yvette Guilbert was also in favour of them, while Catulle Mendès sent the following characteristic telegram to the symposium:

"Admire convenient short skirt worn by working girls and ladies' maids. Detest abominable zouave's trousers which haven't even the excuse of being red."

The question was never settled and women continued to ride the bicycle in whatever costume they liked best.

But already in 1896 the enthusiasm of the smart world had waned. Young people, including young girls, continued to ride, but those who prided themselves either upon setting or closely following the fashion had already given it up.

There was, however, one admirable and enduring result of the bicycling craze. France rediscovered her roads, neglected ever since the coming of the railways. This discovery caused a complete revolution in French social life, and its full effects cannot be appreciated until we come to the motor-car era after the World War. But those of us who are interested in tracing such things will find that the impetus was given when the bicycle first launched its thousands of riders into the French countryside. It was the little steel fairy who waved the wand, although the transformation scene was not revealed immediately.

For more than thirty years the roads of France had lain neglected. Only peasants and country landowners ever had any occasion to use them; the bulk of the population never set foot thereon. It seemed as though they were to lie discarded for ever.

Then the transformation came. People rediscovered the pleasures that their fathers used to know; the attraction of roaming round picturesque villages, of visiting ancient houses and churches and forgotten corners of France, the delights of lunching in little old inns where huge fires crackled on open hearths, of drinking thankfully in wayside cafés while little fountains splashed in the shelter of ancient trees, of watching the life and movement of strange places. Once again men tasted the freshness of clear morning air, watched the panorama of the changing sky and lost themselves in the silence of the woods, forgetting time and place. Once again they re-learned the ancient order of the road; the covered carts laden with produce clanking along to market; the little donkey-carts driven by poor old peasants, the local carrier, the doctor, also on a bicycle, the flocks of sheep, the stupid geese and still more stupid poultry.

Among all these things which, twenty years later, we see framed through our motor-car windows, the cyclists of 1900 moved. They were the first to get back the knowledge familiar to the men who had ridden on horse-back or stage-coach along the ancient ways of France.

All those things so enthusiastically acclaimed by our

contemporaries who have just bought a car were fully appreciated by Frenchmen, and particularly Parisians, in 1890 and 1900. Early on fine Sundays they swarmed out of Paris in hordes of both sexes, returning in the evening dusty and tired on mud-spattered machines, but happy and exalted, bearing wild flowers on their handle-bars and something of the content bestowed by sunlight and space in their eyes.

The next development was the trial of muscular effort and endurance in cycle races. The first of these was between Bordeaux and Paris in 1891, and it was organized by the Bordeaux Vélo Club. We can imagine the excitement aroused over what then seemed a contest of endurance over an incredible distance. It was commonly said that nobody could possibly complete the course. At Angoulême, 132 kilometres from the starting-point, beds were got ready for the competitors who, after such a grueling journey, it was considered, would not be capable of anything but collapsing into them.

When the course was actually completed from beginning to end people were astounded. There were twenty-eight entrants, including five famous English cyclists. The winners were carried shoulder-high amid loud acclamation and their feat lauded in all the newspapers. The latter regaled their readers with full circumstantial details of this unparalleled feat—seventy-two hours on a saddle.

Other sports rapidly grew in popularity. Rugby football, that image of war, was taken up with enthusiasm by the military students, and soon matches were held in the public stadia. The most savage of all games, after boxing, Rugby nevertheless provides a valuable training in discipline and communal effort, for the most heroic of individual performances is worth less than solid and united teamwork.

Tennis, on the other hand, is essentially elegant. It imposes a rigid sartorial etiquette, nobody dares to play save in immaculate white flannels and shoes, and the short skirts of the women fly like the balls themselves. Everything is the subject of assiduous cultivation—the ground,

the nets, the rackets, the strokes. Certainly it arouses enough excitement and enthusiasm but nobody could compare this precise, calculated, and individual game with the martial onslaught of the Rugby champions.

The age-old sport of running did not lack adherents either. The runners formed clubs, like every one else, and had their rules, their publicists, and their fixtures. Crowds gathered there, too, to watch the spectacle of the competitors, flinging themselves forward with a magnificent animal impetus as they contended for the five miles flat.

Winter sports had always had their faithful few, but these were increasing as rapidly as devotees of every other sport. The attraction of Alpine sports lies in their danger; you risk your life at every attempt. It demands a level head and a sure footing, and it began to exercise a fatally seductive attraction on those who had once experienced its hazards, an attraction summed up by Paul Hervieu in his book *The Murderous Alps*.

Fencing, however, did not enjoy a revival of favour. The subtle and civilized art became less and less attractive to a century which prided itself upon realism and brutality. Boxing, on the contrary, rapidly increased in popularity, although twenty years were to pass before Paris really went mad about it.

The revival of the Olympic Games in 1894 gave an immense impetus to the sporting mania. It was in the great hall of the Sorbonne, before an audience of famous athletes, that M. de Coubertin first broached the project which, two years later, materialized into the first of the New Olympiads in Athens. Successive meetings were at Paris in 1900, at St. Louis in 1904, and in London in 1908. For the whole world had caught athletic fever.

The paucity of suitable accommodation round about Paris for the thousands who wished to participate actively led to the multiplication of clubs and associations in such places as the Bois de Boulogne and Vincennes. Those enthusiasts who could not find accommodation there could be seen in running shorts and shoes pursuing their training in the trenches of the fortifications.



An entirely specialized sporting Press came into existence. *Sporting*, *Le Miroir des Sports*, *La vie au Grand Air* and *Le Pédale* enjoyed immense circulations, and every provincial town of any size had its own sporting journal. Bordeaux, always a great centre of athletic activity, boasted *L'Athlète* and *Le Sportsman*; Marseilles had *Les Sports de Provence*; Toulouse, *Le Midi Sportif*; Grenoble, *Les Alpes Sportives*; and so on. From one end to the other France was flooded with these highly coloured and freely illustrated journals which were eagerly read by enthusiastic youth. Every year was to see their numbers increase, and the end has not yet come.

. . . . .

And now occurred an event which had been eagerly awaited by engineers and others interested in mechanical progress, although the public at large was entirely ignorant of what was going on behind the scenes. Those who followed engineering developments had not forgotten that in 1875 a certain inventor named André Bollet had demonstrated in Paris a steam-driven vehicle called *L'Obéissance*, which had accomplished a trial of 230 kilometres with great facility. It had been duly eulogized by a reporter in *Le Temps* as "an admirable invention which, owing to the control of the exhaust, made its way rapidly in comparative silence, without scaring the horses".

Three years later, at the Universal Exhibition, another steam carriage by the same inventor accomplished a journey from Paris to Vienna. These carriages had nothing to do with the development of the petrol-driven motor-car except that they pointed the way by demonstrating the possibilities of a fast, light, easily handled and easily controlled trackless machine. The steam-driven tricycles and quadri-cycles of Dion and Bouton were on the same principle.

Serpolet's discovery of the steam generator in 1887 was a great stage forward and marked the definitive evolution of the steam-propelled vehicle. Had the internal combustion engine not been invented, it would have been a motor-car of this type which we should all be using to-day.

They were heavy and fearsome-looking vehicles with funnels shaped like blunderbusses and a boiler protected by a strong tank in which the coal was kept, while another tank behind carried the water. A contemporary illustration shows one of these odd contraptions with a bowler-hatted man in front, presumably the driver, and an elegant personage in a top-hat, doubtless the chosen passenger, sitting behind.

The invention of the explosive motor and of pneumatic tyres and the introduction of motor-spirit turned these attempts into other channels and ultimately produced, before the eyes of the astounded Parisians, the first motor-cars. But the motor-car did not excite national enthusiasm as did the bicycle. Then as now, and very much more so, the motor-car was costly, and it can never claim to be as truly democratic as "the little queen". Is it even a sport? Certainly it requires nerve and a minimum of skill, but there is absolutely no muscular effort involved. From all of which arises the scorn which the race of cyclists traditionally displays for the race of motorists, who are still referred to as "backside squatters".

The first motor-cars were frankly hideous, shook their passengers violently, rattled their windows and gave out a nauseating stench of petrol. They were objects of curiosity rather than desire on the part of the general public, who regarded them as playthings for crack-brained millionaires or similar eccentrics. The idea that he would one day exchange his smart coupé and high-stepping pair for such a contrivance would have brought a smile to the lips of the most perspicacious Parisian.

But gradually they grew out of the stage of being more or less ridiculous mechanical novelties and began to attract serious attention. A great automobile race between Paris and Marseilles on October 4th 1896 marks the real commencement of the motor-car era.

"The winning cars" (says a witness) "were expected in Paris round about 11 or 12 o'clock. From ten o'clock onwards a crowd began to form outside Gillet's restaurant and all along the Boulevard Maillot. It grew so

dense that it was almost impossible to get through, and then, at eighteen minutes past twelve, cheers and shouts from afar off announced the first arrival, the motor-tricycle Dion No. 15 driven by Collomb. It is impossible to describe the wild enthusiasm with which the crowd surged forward, while a charming young girl presented the hero with an enormous bouquet.

"The vehicle seemed to be in excellent condition, although it had just accomplished more than 1,800 kilometres in the record time of 73 hours 46 minutes. Collomb, however, was so thickly coated with dust as to be almost unrecognizable, and his clothes were spattered with mud and oil. One of the reporters who had followed him from Versailles said that it was awe-inspiring to watch him tear down a slope at a speed of sixty miles an hour.

"Three minutes later came Car No. 6, a Panhard and Levasseur driven by M. René de Knyff, who made his appearance amid frenzied applause. He arrived at twenty-one minutes and forty seconds past twelve.

"All the cars were afterwards taken to the Palace of Industry and exhibited before the crowds who passed in front of them all day long, pointing out details of the works and giving their opinion of the trials. This race, which effectively demonstrated the advantages of petrol over steam, will prove to be a landmark in the wider development of the motor-car."

The witness proved to be a true prophet. Other and more arduous trials followed in succession, Paris-Madrid, Paris-Berlin, and so on, and in each the vehicle showed progressive improvement.

This is the mythical period of motor-car history when the drivers appear like epic heroes and their machines as legendary mechanical monsters.

Everybody was eager to see these palpitating fireballs that leapt into space; everybody wanted to come near them, to examine them, to gaze at the beings who controlled such phenomena. Already the motor-car appeared as the symbol of force and action. Gradually it grew to

inspire an almost religious respect, and to the young men of the decade 1900 to 1910 it was the materialization of their secret dreams. The desire to possess one haunted their lives.

The more practical English viewed it from another angle. "The horse," said Rudyard Kipling, "after all is only a horse, but the motor-car is a time machine." Speed was its primary attraction, the one which, as it came into more general use, was to prove its greatest lure for the public. To be able to go from one place to another at will and without effort, what a delightful miracle. All that they had recovered with such incredible zest with the first popularity of the bicycle was brought before them again, but larger, grander, and more varied somehow. Roads, landscapes, villages, churches, cathedrals, mountains and sea were all offered gratuitously to the motorist; he could select whatever he wished or he could have the whole lot, following any and every whim in the first intoxication of utter and complete mobility.

Any one who wants to recapture all that these things meant in 1900 should read Octave Mirbeau's 626 *E. 8*. It is a pæan of thanksgiving to the motor-car, to its inventors, and to the unprecedented freedom conferred upon men. It is hailed as multiplying his joys and his sensibility, as making him free of the pageant of life.

"My car" (says the author) "is dearer, more serviceable and more instructive to me than all the books in my library, than all the pictures glued to my walls, displaying day by day the same dead images of trees, fountains and skies. My car can give me all these, and they are alive, quivering, swarming, changing, dizzy, illimitable and infinite. . . . I can contemplate without a tremor the dispersion of my books, my pictures, and all my collection, but I cannot bear the thought that a day may come when I shall no longer possess my magic charger, this fabulous unicorn that bears me so gently and swiftly, with a clearer and a keener brain, across the whole map of nature's beauties, the richness and diversity of the human scene."

Entirely without effort the artist in his ecstasy found all the phrases which creak on the pens of assiduous publicity men twenty years later.

What can be said of the aeroplane in this brief review of sport, athletics, and similar things in the years preceding the World War? A very great deal if we were considering the conquest of nature by man, but little enough in the connection which alone interests us in these pages. We are not yet air-minded.

In 1935, despite the gigantic strides we have made from the days of Bleriot and Wilbur Wright, the aeroplane has nevertheless not yet, in France at least, made the slightest difference to our way of living. To-morrow, perhaps, we may suppose, if it pleases us, that flying will be as common as motoring or travelling by train, but to-day the aeroplane remains on the margin of ordinary everyday life. It has not yet sufficiently emancipated itself from the realm of acrobatics to be admitted as a regular means of public transport. As a sport it is costly, more complicated than motoring, and offers nothing like the same variety of interest. As a method of collective transport there may be a future for aviation: as an individual vehicle, we cannot think that it has very much.

But nevertheless the realization of the age-old dream of the mechanical bird has had a profound effect on the imaginations, if not upon the lives and habits, of those who have seen the miracle come to pass. It is a formidable discovery, because it has overwhelmed mankind with the revelation of the infinite powers of science, and from this point of view it must not be passed over in silence.

It was in 1905 that a journalist, M. Robert Coquelle, went to Ohio to interview the brothers Wright, and informed the astounded French readers of *L'Auto* that the aeroplane was a fact. A little while afterwards, Fordyce in *Le Journal* gave further particulars, and soon the brothers Wright arrived in France and carried out their preliminary flights from their aerodrome at Auvours. On July 25th 1909 Bleriot crossed the Channel on his

monoplane, and later in the same year the Comte de Lambert accomplished a no less remarkable flight from Juvisy to Paris and back. The flights of Paulhan, Farman, and the rest of the pioneers have now become classic, not only as exploits but as acts of faith.

The first massed flight of aeroplanes out of Paris gave an inkling of the peculiar quality of the public interest aroused. It was the first public display, and the encircling fortifications of the city provided a natural vantage-point from which the crowd could follow the machines.

"The usual scenes had been anticipated" (says M. Georges Rozet); "a hilarious, noisy and slightly drunken crowd singing and making merry all night. Nothing of the kind took place. Gravely and solemnly, as though awe-stricken by the spectacle of the machines circling over Paris which they had seen the night before, the crowd made its way to the flying-ground. Certainly they carried baskets of provisions, with probably a bottle or two tucked away somewhere, but there was none of the high spirits and chaffing usually associated with a mass exodus from the city. The people seemed to have been drawn almost involuntarily from their beds, impelled by a sense of duty, to issue, as it were, an encouraging bulletin to French invention and enterprise.

"From the first takings-off, punctual to the minute, into an horizon of lurking ambush and mystery, the crowd of pilgrims waited with almost religious intensity. Certainly there were cries and cheers, but not the sentimental and meaningless shouts that we know so well. We were astonished to find such a crowd displaying judgement and control, as though the sense of scientific curiosity dominated even the novelty and excitement of the occasion."

Georges Rozet noted particularly among the younger spectators a considered and understanding admiration, assessed by eyes already trained to discover mechanical beauties by the motor-car and the bicycle:

"It was envy rather than stupefaction or fear which seemed to fill those youthful breasts as they watched the exploits of the aviators."

The attraction of danger and of difficulties overcome, the passion for science and the intoxication of triumph composed the extraordinary state of mind in which the race of men watched the opening stages of the conquest of the air.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ALL PARIS A STAGE

two things stand out in the life of Paris from the year 1900 down to the outbreak of the war. The first is the great and ever-growing influence of the theatre; the second, the peculiar artistic hegemony which music succeeded in arrogating to itself. Of these two phenomena the former is the more striking and far-reaching.

It has been observed already that the French stage did not show itself in the vanguard of the naturalist movement. The school of Zola met with many reverses on the boards before Antoine succeeded in making its offerings fashionable. But by 1900 the battle had been won with a vengeance. The old tradition was riddled from top to bottom, and such realistic writers as Brieux, Cures and Émile Fabre, followed later by the younger men, Paul Hervieu, Bernstein, Bataille, and Capus, were the names with which to conjure large and fashionable audiences.

It is not our function here to criticize the work of these men in detail. At the very lowest estimate, they succeeded collectively in producing one of the most brilliant eras in the history of the Parisian stage. What concerns us rather is to examine their position in contemporary social life and to assess the influence of their personalities and ideas upon public morals, manners, and taste.

Parisians have always been fond of the theatre, but never so much as in the period here under review. The life of the stage had then a very real relation to the life of the world at large, and this particular school of dramatists enjoyed a prestige and a following probably unequalled either before or since.

It was not merely that Parisians flocked to the box-office in unprecedented numbers, but that there was immense public excitement and curiosity about everything connected with the stage. An author who wrote a successful play became not merely a lion in a certain more or less restricted set; he sprang at once on to the topmost



rung of public characters. His work, and the quarrels and scandals so often connected with it, were a universal topic of discussion. The men and women who interpreted his characters were equally in the limelight; their talent, their morals, their manners, and their private lives were all exhaustively described, illustrated, written up, and talked about everywhere. The theatre was the new cult and the whole of Paris a vast, gossiping green-room.

The announcement of a new piece by a successful dramatist was almost a matter of national importance, and any changes or reputed trouble with the cast a public calamity. The whole population lived through the days of alarms and excursions which invariably precede theatre first-nights under a tension which can hardly be described. The *répétition générale* brought this excitement to fever pitch. Given before what was supposed to be an august and distinguished audience, these rehearsals became a kind of religious ceremony with full ritual and attendant hierophants, and the secret ambition of every young Parisian was to become one of this select and hallowed band.

The fashionable painters, who had once imposed their taste and their houses in the Parc Monceau on the great world under the Marshal, were now completely eclipsed. The novelists, who had had their hour of triumph with Zola, and later on with the enormous vogue of Bourget's psychological studies, were also utterly outclassed. Nothing either past or present can be compared with the fever of excitement which surrounded everything connected with the theatre at this time save, perhaps, the exaggerated hero-worship which the younger generation to-day accords certain figures in the worlds of the cinema and sport.

The combined talents of all the French dramatists of the generation would not by themselves have provoked such a state of affairs had it not been for other factors.

The first of these was money. Thanks to their native shrewdness and their organization the descendants of Beaumarchais were easily the most highly paid of all the brotherhood of the pen. A successful piece brought its author a small fortune. The theatre became an industry, a factory working full time, and it yielded immense

profits to everybody connected with it. The power of money to draw the admiration of the crowd and the respect (not unmixed with jealousy) of rivals, has never been more strikingly demonstrated.

Another extraneous factor from which the theatre profited was the slowing down of the round of social engagements. Formal receptions and balls went out of fashion, for only a very few of the extremely rich had escaped a shrinkage of income which inevitably reduced the scale of entertainment. Dancing was definitely out of fashion; people were weary of the interminable balls of yester-year. The love of pleasure had certainly not lessened, but conceptions of pleasure had quite definitely changed. The movement into the open air, increased mobility and the craze for sport, were all factors which influenced people to look for amusement outside their own homes.

The theatre exactly met the need of the moment. It was a communal pleasure which took people away from their domestic surroundings, and it permitted a display of elegance and culture without any of the trouble and expense involved in large receptions and formal entertainments.

Jewish society, which has always been devoted to the theatre, also lent its weight to the scale. The Jews were wealthy; they were financially interested in most of the theatrical ventures, and their backing had helped a great many actors and actresses to success. They had succeeded in creating publicity for all the incidents and personalities connected with the life of the stage, and they had also managed to invest the theatre with that peculiar intellectual and social snobbery which we shall find again when we come to consider the growing popularity of music. So far as the theatre was concerned, however, their task was an easy one, for Parisians have always been the most assiduous, acute, and appreciative of audiences.

There was then, as we have said, a real relation between the life portrayed behind the footlights and the life and manners of the audience. The dramatic formula of the period was the reflection of life. Such plays as *Émile*

Fabre's, dealing with the actual social problems raised by the democratization of society, might almost be said, for the first time since antiquity, to employ the crowd as actors, so closely interwoven were the themes with the reactions of the spectators. The plays of Paul Hervieu and Jules Lemaître were concerned with the moral and psychological problems of the moment, while those of Bernstein and Mirbeau were actual personal experiences, thinly disguised but violently overstated or savagely satirized. Their ferocity and bitterness, and their rather overweening strength, are all the claw-marks of a century of ferment and strife.

Since we desire a world in our own image it is natural that the protagonists of these plays were applauded, admired, and, most particularly, imitated. Every would-be lover or ladies' man yearned to discover in himself the seductive traits of Lucien Guitry, whose personality dominated the stage of the time. His role was the lover who had passed his first youth, for he was fifty at least, but he had a magnificent presence. Mature dandies took heart of grace as they looked on him, for no more would fair listeners receive their proposals with astonishment or ridicule, while the younger men, intimidated by the formidable conquests of experience, would retire from the field. Right down to the outbreak of war, which saw the triumphant return of youth to the sovereignty of love and marriage, the lover had to be middle-aged at least to be smart.

There was also Andre Brulé, supple, insinuating, with a smile at once suave and sinister, and a certain disturbing charm. He was the prototype of the gigolo, the first mould from which thousands have since been patterned.

And there was Max Dearly, anglicized in traits as in name, agile as a clown, inarticulate as a *ballerina*, the man whose fantastic humour set the whole house in an uproar as soon as he appeared on the stage. Is he not a type common among us to-day, cynical, taciturn, unaccountable, not quite sure of himself?

Then there was de Max. Somewhat pretentious, perhaps, his voice a little too musical, his gestures a little too

flowery; but how often have we seen him among the intelligentsia forgathering at the Odéon or in and out of the *Mercur de France*?

The women were equally imposing. Bernhardt, Réjane, and Bartet still held sway, but the younger generation was coming to the fore. Marthe Brandes, sumptuous, passionate and sensitive, is the link which unites the *amoureuse* type of yesterday with that of Berthe Bady, Simone (then Madame Le Bargy), Suzanne Desprès, and Ève Lavallière.

Berthe Bady and Simone were a piquant contrast, the realized dreams of two dramatists of opposing tastes. Simone, the Bernstein heroine, was the woman whose actions were directed to a single end, which she pursued with all her force; Bady, the incarnation of Bataille's women, seeing things not as they are but as her imagination transforms them. Simone, dominating, insatiable, almost masculine in her passions; Bady, sensitive, fleeting and exalted. Which of these types appealed most to people then? They were admirably complementary, in fact, but Simone brought in the more strident modern note.

Suzanne Desprès, melancholy and uneasy, consumed by an inner fire which could not yet destroy her earthly passions, was the ideal Ibsen heroine. She gave out a secret illumination, investing every word and act with an extra significance.

And lastly there was Ève Lavallière.<sup>1</sup> If her type was as old as humanity the mould in which it was cast was signed and dated of the period. She was the plaything of the hour and everybody adored her. Paris would not be Paris without some one like this, and there has never been any one more enchanting.

. . . . .

But the historic institutions of the French stage did not fare so well in this period of excitement and enthusiasm. A generation which found them old-fashioned was inclined to give them the cold shoulder. The Comédie Française was no longer the only place where society and the stage met on an equal footing; the great days when

<sup>1</sup> She retired into a convent just before the war and died in 1933.

the Duc d'Aumale and the Prince de Sagan had forgotten there were past. A few old patrons still came to chat with Le Bargy and Madam Pierson, but the life had gone out of the place.

The Opera fared a little better, for since the Republic had become more certain of its footing politicians felt they could afford a little diversion. Arthur Meyer was still to be found there, fingering his whiskers and staring at you with his blank, unseeing gaze, and Forain still remained faithful to the place where he had sat so often with Degas and Toulouse Lautrec.

At that time everything and everybody had a nickname. Nobody knew who bestowed them; like most of the best epigrams, they were anonymous. Some were attributed to Tristan Bernard, others to Lucien Guitry, but most of them were born in the Opera foyer and whispered from mouth to mouth all over Paris.

The Director of the Opera was called the Procurator to the Republic on account of the numerous liaisons between politicians and dancers.

When Clemenceau, despite his anti-clericalism, went into a convent hospital for an operation to the prostate gland, he was promptly drubbed Julien le Prostate.

A literary charmer with a taste for publicity was Madame Réclamier.

The artist Helleu, celebrated for the rapidity with which he dashed off his fashionable etchings and crayon drawings, was Le Watteau à Vapeur.

Eugene Brieux, who had dared to treat the forbidden subject of venereal disease in a play, became Le Mercure de France.

Lucien Guitry's theatre was a great forcing-house for these shafts of malice. Between 1902 and 1909, the period during which it was under the great comedian's direction, the Théâtre de la Renaissance was the centre of Parisian social life. A close rival was the Variétés, under the management of Samuel, whose famous troupe included such diverse talent as Max Dearly, Jeanne Granier, Ève Lavallière, and Mistinguett.

The Porte St. Martin could not claim such dazzling

eminence, but its production of *Cyrano de Bergerac* gave it a position of its own, for Rostand was a characteristic figure of this period of Parisian society, and the play was so popular that every detail concerning him was of immense interest to the public.

His play *L'Aiglon*, written round the Duc de Reichstad, son of Napoleon and his Austrian consort Marie Louise, enhanced his reputation, and incidentally that of Sarah Bernhardt, who was in the title role; but the piece which he expected would be his *chef-d'œuvre* and win him immortality was *Chantecler*, produced in 1910. Never before had a play been given so much publicity, not only because Rostand was its author, but because it constituted a new and daring conception, a sensational innovation, one might say, of the dramatic art. To make a cock, a dog, a black-bird, and a pheasant express the poet's ideas of the joy in work and in being humbly useful was an amazing departure from recognized stagecraft, and no wonder columns of picturesque description of the play were published in the newspapers weeks before the *première*, no wonder *Chantecler* was the talk of Paris, London, and other European capitals, not to speak of New York. Here was a case of excessive booming doing harm to a play instead of furthering its success.

Undoubtedly the playwright of the moment, Rostand, had put his whole faith in this lyrical farmyard drama. A cruel disillusionment awaited him. *Chantecler* was applauded, but the auditors were disconcerted on hearing the high and noble conceptions of a poet interpreted by denizens of the farmyard, and the result was only a half success, and barely that. Rostand was wounded in his sensibilities. He had written a beautiful lyric poem, not, as he had fondly imagined, a play which would keep his fame alive for all time. He never got over his disappointment, and during the nine years of life which yet remained to him he wrote only a few poems, none of which added much lustre to his reputation.

The taste for "intimate" theatres was first launched by the inauguration of the Théâtre des Capucines, with its minute stage no larger than a private drawing-room,

where every line came straight across the footlights and the actors and the audience seemed almost one. The success of the Capucines stimulated the building of numerous other theatres of the same type. Fémina, Les Mathurins, and, later on, La Potinière, the Théâtre de l'Avenue, and the Théâtre Daunou. As the stage became more and more straitened, the plays had perforce to follow suit, and casts of three and four characters only became the rule for the fashionable play of the period.

One of these little theatres, the Grand Guignol, deserves special attention, as it has given its name to a certain type of entertainment all over the world. Originating at the height of the naturalist movement, its claim, which it abundantly fulfilled, was to give the public a series of brief spectacles in which the extremes of horror and farce alternately should be portrayed. This hot and cold shower was cunningly turned on by talented actors to a bored and satiated audience which could only be aroused by the most brutal stimuli.

Another contemporary fad was the public lecture, which passed away an agreeable hour of the day for a restless public always in search of some new, unexacting, and brief diversion. The lectures were short and pleasant; they made a pretence at being educative while providing, in their accompanying songs and music, a theatrical show in miniature. And when, as so often, the lecturer was a favourite novelist or dramatist, the audience had the additional thrill of seeing a public hero in the flesh and drinking in his words as they were spoken.

The music hall, which, although it was not to attain its greatest popularity until after the war, first began to take the shape we know to-day during the years 1900 and 1914. The Folies-Bergères, the Olympia, and, later on, the Moulin Rouge, began to ascend that mounting curve of spectacles, more and more lavish, more and more extensive and more and more undressed. A mixture of the café concert, the circus, the operetta, and the pantomime, the music hall takes some ingredients from all these while actually resembling none of them. It is devised for over-worked digestions and underworked intelligences, for

foreigners, shop-assistants on the spree, and little ladies on the make. It is only fair to add that the sumptuousness and sometimes even the artistry of its costumes, its dazzling lights and ingenious settings, and the sheer physical beauty of so many of its enormous cast, make a certain appeal to more critical spectators.

The first revues were modest attempts, but they grew rapidly to a pitch of splendour which for those days was unparalleled. The star was usually a woman. Liane de Pougy appeared before 1900 in *L'Arraignée d'Or* at the Folies-Bergères, followed successively by *Le Rêve de Noël*, *La Princesse au Sabbat*, and *La Belle aux Cheveux d'Or*.

About this time Loie Fuller introduced her serpentine dances, and first Paris and then the whole world went into raptures over them.

"It is more than a dance" (said Jean Lorrain) "it is a revelation of light, an evocation from the other world. It is a mystery. Flames of light and shadow rise up and die down, sometimes climbing in spirals, sometimes fluttering like wings, then swirling out wide in gigantic scrolls until at last, out of this whirl of flowing, vaporous light, a woman's bust emerges, the arms and shoulders gleaming delicately white among the petals of a giant violet or in the hollow of an enormous butterfly's rainbow coloured wings."

The popularity of the music hall really dates from the time when Paris flocked to see this whirlwind of flame and gauze, the sorceress who described her art as "sculpture in light". It had at least one of the essentials of genuine art. It compelled the beholders to use their imaginations.

A little later on the "cake walk", prelude to so many bizarre and extravagant dances, became the rage. It was introduced by M. Gabriel Astruc, who had seen it danced by negroes in America, and it immediately achieved the success he had foreseen for it.

June 25th 1907 is a date of importance in the annals of music-hall entertainment since it saw the first appearance of the Paris apache as a theatrical hero. On that date Max



Dearly and Mistinguett danced their famous *Valse Chaloupée* for the first time in *La Revue de la Femme*.

The origin of the dance is not without interest. Some years before Max Dearly and a party of friends had gone, out of curiosity, to a dance hall in a low quarter of the town. The orchestra consisted of a piano, a clarinet, a cornet, and a drum, and to its harsh, unmelodic strains couples of very dubious respectability swayed and clung together in a peculiar dance which excited the actor's interest by its original character and rhythm, savage and caressing by turns. He took a note of it, worked at it intermittently, perfecting the rhythm and improving the steps, and finally proposed to Samuel, the manager of the Variétés, to introduce it there. Samuel thought that it would shock his patrons, and declined, but when, the summer following, Max Dearly went to the Moulin Rouge to partner Mistinguett, they decided to try it out.

Everybody knows how immediately successful it was, and how, from that time down to the present, there has been a veritable plague of apache dancers.

The music-hall stage had by then begun to combine a number of diverse attractions.

There was that extraordinary gnome, Little Tich; there was Fregoli, at once singer, clown, dancer, quick-change artist, and comedian. And there was still Yvette Guilbert, singing old French songs with incomparable artistry. The audiences laughed with Mayol, shuddered with Severin, and discovered with appreciation the charm and ability of the troops of English dancing girls. It was the day of new rhythms, the harsh strains of the *Valse Chaloupée*, the seductive waltzes of Vienna and the jingles from *The Belle of New York*.

The music hall had already become a vast international factory for the mass production of pleasure. Every season its impresarios combed the earth and racked fantasy to produce more and more sumptuous spectacles, colossal casts, dazzling costumes, and original sensations for an audience which grew ever larger, more exacting, and more insatiable.

. . . . .

We have now to consider a much more pretentious subject—the immense growth of the general appreciation of classical music during the ten years prior to 1914. The least that can be said of it was that it was wholly startling and unprecedented. Parisians, although they love to hum the latest tune and have always been devoted to light operetta, have very little natural taste for classical music, and, save for a select few, they had seldom risen above Gounod's *Faust* and Massenet. For twenty years they had shut their ears to César Franck and had utterly ignored Beethoven. During the Second Empire, and even during the first years of the Third Republic, it was quite impossible for Wagner to get a hearing at all. M. René Dumesnil, in his valuable and informative book *Le Monde des Musiciens*, recalls an amusing instance of an audience which conscientiously hissed the overture to *Der Freischütz* in the belief that it was listening to the funeral march from *Götterdämmerung*. But in due course intellectual snobbery produced a Wagnerian cult among the young intellectuals, and in 1885 Édouard Duardin founded *La Revue Wagnérienne*, whose contributors included Mendès, Péladan, Villiers de l'Isle Adam, Mallarmé, and Verlaine.

These enthusiasts went to Bayreuth regularly as on a pilgrimage. Year by year their numbers increased until they were considerable enough not, certainly, to impose their idol on the public but at least to guarantee him a measure of applause on the rare occasions when any one dared to put him into a programme.

When in 1888 it was announced that Lamoureux proposed to produce *Lohengrin*, the public was up in arms, although triumph and hope reigned in the Wagnerian camp. On the eve of the production *Le Temps* published an interview with Alphonse Daudet in which that venerated writer affirmed his love and enthusiasm for the great musician. But the eye of Déroulède was on the watch. "While I live," said he, "there shall be no German music heard in Paris." He called up his Leaguers and posted them all round the theatre, to hiss and abuse and even to intercept those who were hardy enough to try to go in.

But in spite of Déroulède, inside the theatre a large number of students and musical people, including Léon Daudet, applauded to the echo, and the first real hearing of Wagner's music made an instantaneous conquest among the *élite* of Paris. Soon *The Ride of the Valkyries* began to creep regularly into concert programmes, and finally the great music-dramas were staged. The men to whose enterprise and persistence is due the credit for this are Padeloup and Édouard Colonne, the latter of whom installed himself at the Châtelet where he remained for nearly half a century.

The Colonne Sunday Concerts at the Châtelet were a typical facet of the life of the period. Under the dominating baton of a romantic conductor passionately devoted to his work, the marvellous orchestra flooded the great hall with vibrating waves of sound, unloosing the chords of Berlioz and Wagner and César Franck in an almost religious atmosphere, where hundreds of people sat in tranced communion with genius. The vast assembly thrilled and responded as one entity. But the most moving spectacle of all was to be found in the cheap seats at the back of the house, where, for the price of a franc, a crowd of poor students, school-teachers, long-haired poets, and earnest little clerks sat huddled together on hard backless benches, with dust and refuse all round them, some so dizzily high that they could scarcely bear to look down. For the privilege of sitting in this abominable place they had waited long hours in a queue, climbed on tired legs up innumerable stairs, and very possibly gone without lunch or dinner. But nothing could affect their enthusiasm as they sat content in the shadow solaced by their spiritual food.

Other famous concerts of the period were those at the Conservatoire and those given by Lamoureux at the Cirque d'Été. Chamber concerts were too numerous to be cited.

Well, one gets accustomed to all noises at a price, as the poet said!

One of the most interesting of the musical pioneers was Count Isaac de Camondo. He was the founder of the Société des Artistes et Amis de l'Opéra, and a sleeping

partner in almost every musical enterprise of the period. Without his financial support such novelties as *Louise* and *Pelléas* would have petered out after four or five performances, if, indeed, they had ever succeeded in getting put on at all.

He had chosen to live at the very doorway of the theatre, in a large building where he had three suites of rooms to house his magnificent collection of pictures by Fragonard, Forain, Monet, Degas, Cézanne, and Boucher, not forgetting the famous Falconnet clock.

"The dining-room" (says M. Garbiel Astruc) "was, like the drawing-room, a veritable picture-gallery. After a glass of the velvety wine of Samos we ate eggs cooked in the Oriental fashion in burning oil for 48 hours, then a turbot simmered down almost to a jelly. These masterpieces of the culinary art, worthy complements to those other masterpieces which hung upon the walls, were prepared by a renowned Turkish chef who had been with the Camondo family for thirty years."

This Lucullus turned Mæcenas of music was to find in M. Astruc the man who made a good many of his dreams come true. M. Astruc was able, energetic, a first-class organizer, and a man who knew his Parisians perfectly. In his delightful reminiscences, *Le Pavillon de Fantômes*, he tells us how, with the financial assistance of Camondo, he started in 1904 the Pavilion de Hanovre as headquarters of the musical society they had just founded. The place was to become a sort of club for all the chief figures of the musical world—musicians, singers, composers, and enthusiasts.

Knowing the foibles of Parisian society as he did, M. Astruc realized that the only way to make music popular was to make it fashionable, to launch it under the auspices of those men and women who set the tone. His idea was to synchronize the musical season with the Paris social season, which lasts from May till the end of June, and to endeavour to make all the great social functions and private parties occasions for introducing some musical prodigy.

"Twenty or thirty drawing-rooms were thrown open eagerly awaiting the arrival of the transatlantic boats or the Orient Express with their freight of foreign stars: Selma Kurz, Emmy Destinn, Farrar, Chaliapine, Titto Ruffo, etc. All of them were 'booked up' months ahead and had hardly an hour at their disposal. Hostesses vied with each other in securing the first appearance of this or that celebrated singer prior to the public début. On one of these occasions, when Massenet had consented to accompany Geraldine Farrar, the hostess, Princess Murat, could not succeed in obtaining the silence of her guests. Finally Massenet, red as a cock's comb with anger, brought down the lid of the grand piano with a loud slam, like Jules Jouy imitating the drop of the guillotine at the Chat Noir. This sudden bomb succeeded in quieting the rabble.

"At a reception by Madame Porges, the Austrian Ambassador honoured the appearance of his fellow-countrywoman, Selma Kurz, whose dazzling technique astounded her hearers in *Lakmé*. Arthur Rubinstein accompanied Emmy Destinn in *Butterfly* at the Baroness Gustave de Rothschild's, and in the garden of Madame Maurice Ephrussi's house in the Avenue du Bois, Pavlova with twenty tarlatan nymphs danced Chopin's Nocturnes in authentic moonlight. Princess Murat's garden, or park, to be exact, was transformed on these summer nights to a lamp-hung forest with the orchestra in the shadows, while in an open-air theatre off the Faubourg Saint-Honoré, Madame Henri de Rothschild recreated for us the ballets of Lully and Rameau. . . ."

Thanks to such activities as these, public musical performances became ever more numerous and popular. There were musical galas in the Galerie des Glaces at Versailles; a *Faust* gala, where Gounod, Berlioz, and Schumann were all included; a performance of *Carmen* at the Opéra, for which Daniel le Pradire recruited teams of white mules, resplendent shawls, and authentic toreador costumes from Spain. There was the performance of

Strauss's *Salomé*, the first appearance of Caruso at the Théâtre Sarah Bernhardt, his triumphs later on at the Châtelet, and the sensational productions of *The Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian* and *Hélène de Sparte*. A galaxy of glittering nights, increasing in number and splendour as the world marched on to the brink of war.

But, perhaps, the crowning achievement of the indefatigable M. d'Astruc was the discovery of Diaghilev and the Russian Ballet, which has left its mark so indelibly upon the stage of the world. Their first appearance was at the Châtelet in 1909.

The first programme combined opera and ballet. Before the stupefied and entranced audience appeared Rimsky-Korsakoff's *Ivan le Terrible*, Glinka's *Rustan and Ludmilla*, Tcherepine's *Pavillon d'Armide*, and Ida Rubinstein in *Cléopâtre*, wearing a blue wig and with her body almost encrusted with diamonds and rubies. Later on came *Schérérazade*, *Carnaval*, *Pétrouchka*, and *L'Après-midi d'un Faune*—and crowds came to gaze at Karsavina as their fathers had looked at Grisi and Taglioni.

We have passed through so much since those far-away nights that they seem to have taken on something of the quality of historic occasions. We remember the amazement, the excitement, and the admiration that surged in our breasts. It seemed as though a new world was being charted before us, an immense force released by whose impetus we were all caught up. Long before the Russian Revolution came to destroy more than we can yet assess of the world that once we knew, there in the *Sacré de Printemps* was prefigured its essence, a complete overthrow of the classic conceptions which had hitherto held sway.

Already its strange influence was showing in a hundred directions—in art, in costume, in interior decoration and furnishing, and in theatre-craft and production. The debauch of primitive colour, and unrestrained passion which these spectacles displayed have had ramifications whose extent we are only just now able to trace. Once more in the history of the West the seductive Orient had broken into a grey and formal régime and convulsed it

entirely. The Russian Ballet is on any account an important force in the history of aesthetics.

But to return to our period. No sooner was the Russian Ballet introduced than M. d'Astruc turned his attention to another project, which was to endow Paris with a perpetual Temple of Music.

In 1913 the Théâtre des Champs Élysées was opened with a pomp, ceremony, and public excitement only paralleled in the history of the Third Republic by the state opening of the new Opéra under Marshal MacMahon.

The new theatre encountered grave financial difficulties from the outset and also sustained a barrage of opposition from all the more conservative spirits by whom the Opéra was regarded as the apotheosis of appropriate decoration and fitness for the purpose. For the new house, designed by the brothers Perret, was the direct antithesis of the older: a vast interior void of columns and distracting ornaments, chastely decorated so as to display its admirable proportions, and designed primarily to give perfect acoustics. It had an immense but not a disproportionate stage, and every detail had been taken into careful consideration, right down to the purple hangings of the boxes, designed to show up the women's dresses.

There was a triumphal first night.

"Motor-cars drew up with a flourish before the entrance, one after another" (says the proud founder), "and the projectors on the Eiffel Tower threw a stream of light on to the white marble façade, displaying the details of Bourdelle's frieze of Apollo and the Muses.

"When they first came into the theatre the audience seemed dazed and a little stupefied. Presently they recovered and began to examine the interior with curiosity. Some sneered and others exclaimed, but most people waited for their neighbours to give them a lead. The words 'Munich' and 'German neo-classic' were freely bandied around.

"Time has long since laid its patina on the walls, the colour, and the gilding, and the absurd legend is dead.

We had the women to thank for this in the first place. Abel Faivre understood them very well and he had provided just the sort of setting which would make them exclaim, 'What a delightful interior, *so* sympathetic,' and, 'You can see and be seen *everywhere!*' The light and charming colour scheme radiated feminine elegance, and in the interval subscribers could leave their places and promenade in the atrium, or hold receptions in their boxes as if they were in their own drawing-rooms."

The women were not to have it all their own way, however. Masculine elegance was well to the fore with the Marquis de Castellane, with his gardenia and his white gloves, rubbing shoulders with the Comte de Beaumont, a Venetian magnifico in a black tail coat. A little way off, the pleated shirt front of the Marquis de Gabriac bent over Madame de Pourtales's fabulous dog-collar of pearls. And there would be the Comte d'Haussonville, Luzarche d'Azy, Arthur Meyer, and André de Fouquières. Also his brother, immaculate as one of Alfred de Dreux's heroes, equally imperturable in escorting the Queen of Roumania one night and Monsieur Raymond Poincaré another.

But the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées was destined to ill-fortune. Overburdened with expenses, putting on lavish and costly spectacles one after another, it did not receive from the public at large that measure of continuous support which its initiative merited. M. Gabriel Astruc, after months of struggle, had to confess himself beaten, and give up.

The set-back was decisive. It proved once again that Parisians have no inherent love for music and that the devotees of classical music, augmented as they may be from time to time by fashion and snobbery, are still only a small proportion of the French public and are powerless to impose their preferences on it. Of course this was not realized at once. Music continued to attract the socially elect down to the eve of 1914, and it manifested a good deal of activity again after the end of the war. But the



mere sight of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, that beautiful, empty, and unwanted theatre, serves as a reminder that a temple can be too large for its worshippers.

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We cannot leave this description of the Parisian stage prior to the outbreak of the war without some reference to the cinema, that scientific projection of the theatre, hailed by its admirers as a fifth art. But as a matter of fact it was not until after 1915 or 1916 that the cinema began to attract a sufficient audience to make it in any way an influence upon public manners and opinion.

In the beginning it was poor, plain, mediocre, and entirely without glamour. We smiled at the indifferent scenarios, the threadbare production and the *naïveté* of the actors. It was a new and ingenious diversion—nothing more. The first film to attract any public attention was *Forfaiture*, in which the Japanese actor, Sessue Hawakaya, a magnificent mime, revealed something of the cinema's potentialities, and acquired that enthusiastic personal following which Paris so generously bestows upon her favourite entertainers.

In those days nobody talked about cinema art. It seemed to be easy enough to translate a play into light and shadow and to project it by a mechanical contrivance on to a blank screen in front of an unexacting audience. What could be simpler than to adapt existing masterpieces to this new technique and present them to a new and enormous public? And so various enthusiasts, with the intrepidity of ignorance, rushed in to produce great spectacles.

The most praiseworthy of these pre-war efforts were the productions of the Film d'Art Company, whose greatest success was *The Assassination of the Duc de Guise* by Henry Lavedan, in which Le Bargy and Duflos appeared. Réjane, Mounet, Delvair, Huguenet, and other stars of the legitimate stage did not disdain to appear in these productions, which, feeble as they seem to us now, excited considerable enthusiasm at the time.

Immature as they were, these spectacles demonstrated

the possibility of making the cinema an entertainment fit for cultured intelligences. But already the cinema theatres were being crowded out by a public which had no use for entertainment of that sort, and it was not long in making its preferences felt. So began the era of crime serials and Wild Western thrillers, those palpitating mysteries which ran through innumerable episodes, each cut short at the most harrowing moment; those dashing horsemen galloping across the illimitable American prairie; the horse-play, the custard-pie throwing, all the exuberances of a strange land and a new and lusty people. The timid essays of the French cinema artists provoked indifference or ridicule; it was an intensely discouraging period for our native producers and talent.

This was the state of the cinema on the outbreak of the Great War. It was then so far from outrivalling the theatre and from exerting even the slightest influence upon minds and manners that even a conservative forecast of its future predominance all over the world would have been hailed with laughter and incredulity.

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## CHAPTER XIV

### THE GREAT DAYS OF PARIS

THE Third Republic began with commendable alacrity to complete the Haussmann plan for the reconstruction of the capital, but we are obliged to chronicle the fact that after the first outburst of enthusiasm the work proceeded with extreme dilatoriness. The face of Paris was certainly completely changed between 1860 and 1880, but it was hardly modified at all from the latter date down to 1914. It took more than twenty years to unite the disconnected sections of the Boulevard Raspail, and as to the famous half-finished Boulevard Haussmann—that god-send to comedians and song writers short of a joke—it was not until after the war that the work was again resumed. Save for the one gigantic enterprise which was begun just before the Exhibition of 1900, it seemed that the public authorities were suffering from complete inertia.

This enterprise, the commencement of the Metropolitan Railway, had been discussed so much before, during and after its inauguration, that people began to wonder whether it really existed. It did though; the first stage had been commenced as far back as October 19th 1899, a date which is an authentic landmark in the history of Paris.

Flocks of curious citizens came to gaze upon that first little line from the Place de la Nation to the Porte Dauphine. They took their tickets, went down to the bowels of the earth, passed through the turnstiles and clambered excitedly into the trains. The principal impressions gathered seem to have been of the extreme cleanliness and the abundance of light. We read one account after another in the papers of the time extolling these characteristics; the lighting was, in fact, incredibly lavish for the period and the spick-and-spanness of the stations rare enough in France at any time.

And then it was so quick. Paris forsook its omnibuses, its trams, and its horse cabs that now seemed so slow and

so dirty. Everybody wanted to ride on the new exciting and immaculate Métro: its success was immediate.

Future developments were, of course, to favour it enormously. What would have happened without it to a Paris denuded of omnibuses and taxis during the war? And who could imagine the town without it to-day?

The only other change in the physiognomy of Paris prior to 1914 was the appearance of the motor-bus.

The first autobus plied between the Bourse and the Cours de la Reine on December 8th 1905, and the first regular service, Montmartre-St. Germain-des-Prés, dates from June 1906. Taxis made their appearance about the same time, but were not generally adopted by Parisians until some years later. Even at the outbreak of the war the number of horse cabs on the streets was still very considerable.

The street scene had not changed very much; there were still the same idle crowds and the same unoccupied air about the passers by of both sexes. There was one notable difference, however: people went out less and less after dinner. Gone was the running stream of light from shops and cafés which, right up till midnight used to bathe the procession of worthy citizens finishing up their evening stroll. After the 1900 Exhibition the big shops developed the habit of putting up their shutters earlier and earlier, and the exit from the theatres was not marked by any particular liveliness. Nocturnal revellers were becoming fewer and fewer each season. With the exception of the Montmartre district, which was a sort of licensed pleasure quarter, Paris was no longer a city of gay night life. Everything went quiet after dinner until the morning.

But still between five and eight the cafés on the boulevard were thronged with people, although many of the most famous resorts had disappeared, Tortoni's first, then the Café Riche, and eventually the Café Anglais.

The real centre of Parisian life during this period was the Café Napolitain—"le Napo". At least two generations of journalists had sat with their elbows on its polished tables, and at least two generations of actors and show-girls had sat outside on the terrace drinking the small Vichy prescribed for disordered digestions.

It would be impossible to enumerate them all. We must content ourselves with mentioning the famous table on the left where sat Catulle Mendès, Ernest La Jeunesse, Georges Feydeau, Georges Courteline, Jean de Mitty, and Paul Franck. What a pity we cannot listen-in to their talk—critical, cruel, and amusing—as they dropped in one by one from a rehearsal, an art exhibition, or a row at the editorial offices.

Catulle Mendès was almost a patriarchal figure in these assemblies round the little green glasses, while as for Georges Feydeau, Le Napo was only one stage in the melancholy pilgrimage he made from café to café throughout the night.

In the room on the right most usually sat Alfred Capus and Emmanuel Arène. Tall, sallow, with a pointed beard and rather neglectful of his person, Arène spent his time making a tour of all the ministries trying to find jobs for his supporters, invariably finishing up his day's work by a sumptuous lunch. Towards the evening he was, as he used to say himself, "in form", and his conversation was scintillating.

As for Capus, his round face with its short-sighted, half-closed eyes, thick lips, and his monocle, composed a physiognomy renowned throughout Paris. He was dined, fêted, and pampered by every one, and his cordiality was colossal. He was always ready to shake hands with any one. "Why not?" he used to say. "I have shaken hands with all the rascals of Paris and even with a few honest men."

He was always dropping epigrams in the best style of boulevard philosophy, such as:

"How many happily married people are only estranged by the ceremony?"

"Women keep a special corner of their memories for sins they haven't committed."

"If a woman has a profession she doesn't want a husband. A lover is enough."

"How many people refrain from quarrelling because they have mutual friends?"

"It is not enough to say nowadays that so and so has arrived. It is necessary to establish in what state."

"Speculating on the Exchange is like being wounded in battle: you don't see the man who shoots you."

"People always say of a scoundrel that he is an able fellow, and of an honest man that he's a damned fool."

Capus was a brilliant representative of the century-old tradition that kept the boulevard supplied with aphorisms after its own heart.

Next to Le Napo, the favourite café of the period was the Weber in the rue Royale, to which Léon Daudet has devoted so many enthusiastic pages.

There used to sit the young Marcel Proust, a pale young man with gazelle-like eyes, nervously chewing the end of his drooping brown moustache, and enveloped in woollen mufflers like a rare Chinese antique. He would call for fruit and water, he had always either just got up or was just going to bed, and he was always bored to extinction. And then, suddenly drawn into conversation by a remark from some new arrival, he would proceed to talk with a brilliancy and animation which astounded them all.

"There was in his make-up something of Mercutio and something of Puck. He was always trying to follow half a dozen trains of thought at once, being naturally complex, subtle, and hyper-analytical. He could, when he liked, display immense ingenuity in being amiable, and he was eternally devoured by obscure and ironic scruples."

Near him would be Toulet, bent over a weird American drink, and the king of gastronomes, Curnonsky, fat as a Rabelaisian monk, Léon Daudet, tumultuous and cordial, the stammering Mariéton, and Louis de la Salle, who was to be killed in the war. A little farther off would be Debussy, dreaming in a cloud of cigarette smoke, and Forain and Caran d'Ache. . . .

About 1900 the American bar began to make its appearance in Paris. The bar is essentially different from the café. The latter is open on the street, extending its welcome to all passers-by; it is lively, noisy, and quarrelsome. But the bar has a secret and furtive air. Usually

it is down a few steps or in some by-way; it is dimly lit, silent, intimate, almost contemplative. The high wooden counter, the stools, the seductive array of bottles on glass shelves, the imperturbable barman in his white coat, the patrons silently drinking a Martini or huddled together in a corner talking in low tones—all these things go to make up a very special atmosphere, a closed sanctuary against the feverish life that beats on the door, a place for rest, truce, and forgetfulness.

The bar became fashionable almost immediately. People like Ernest La Jeunesse and Jean de Mitty began to spend hours in Calisaya's and Maxim's, the first two to become popular. By 1914 Paris was full of them.

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No description of the great days of Paris would be complete without a reference to the visits of the royal personage who had endeared himself to all Parisians in all walks of life—the Prince of Wales, afterwards King Edward VII. The Prince's popularity increased with each visit. Usually he arrived in the capital semi-incognito, as was the case in 1889 when he visited the Exhibition and ascended the Eiffel Tower. He made many lifelong friends in the city. His appearance in the capital was regarded as an event of the first magnitude, and journalists recorded his movements from hour to hour, gave detailed descriptions of his clothes, hats, and ties, which men of fashion were not slow to imitate, and waxed enthusiastic over his jovial smile and his air of complete detachment as he walked along the boulevards, frequently unattended. The Prince was as popular in the streets as in the most exclusive *salons*. He liked Paris—no doubt about that—and he was conscious of the respect—one might even say the affection—which he inspired even among fervent Republicans and Democrats, who seized every opportunity of acclaiming him.

Eloquent proof of the esteem which Parisians had for him was furnished when as King Edward he arrived in Paris from Rome on May Day 1903. He had not visited the city for several years. The Boer War had intervened,

and there were many Frenchmen whose sympathies were wholly with the men of the veldt. Certain newspapers, notably *La Patrie*, for which Lucien Millevoye, a deputy, wrote flamboyant articles, and *La Presse* (*La Patrie* no longer exists, and *La Presse* has now an outlook different from that of those days) started a campaign against the royal visit, urging their readers not to salute the King as he drove through the streets.

The campaign became so furious that it was timidly suggested in a certain quarter that His Majesty's visit might be cancelled. But King Edward, unerring psychologist as he was, knew Paris and the temperament of Parisians, and when he arrived at the Port Dauphine Station in the Bois de Boulogne and was welcomed by the smiling President Loubet and drove with him in the presidential landau down the avenue des Champs-Élysées preceded by the band of the Garde Republicaine playing "There'll be a hot time in the old Town to-night", he was given the greatest, the most enthusiastic, of all the receptions accorded to him during his visits to Paris.

The French Government of that day sensed the significance of the visit, and the cheering multitudes in the streets, at the special race meeting at Vincennes, at the gala performance at the Opéra, seemed to have a premonition of a great happening. They were soon to know the real purport of King Edward's visit. The Royal hand had been seen in the shaping of his country's foreign policy. The Entente Cordiale was born.

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Continuing the story of the rapid transformation of Paris, the most striking change in the appearance of the streets between 1900 and 1914 was afforded, as we have said, by the introduction of motor-buses and taxis. During these years, Science, our new all-powerful sovereign, was extending her realm on every side. She permitted us to move rapidly and without impediment below the surface of the earth; to illumine our houses and streets in so dazzling a fashion that the old quivering gas-jets that used to flicker like night moths at the corners of dark,



mysterious streets, were rapidly superseded and forgotten. First came the incandescent gas lamp, and finally electric lighting, which enabled the streets to shine under an even white glow over which the multicoloured announcements of theatres and cafés played like a perpetual firework display. Electricity rapidly spread everywhere, in theatres, restaurants, big shops, little shops, houses and flats, and so another little revolution was accomplished.

One of the most influential mediums in moulding Parisian taste was the establishment of the Motor Salon as an annual affair. People did not only flock to the Grand Palais to admire the new cars, but also to marvel at the power and volume of the lighting, intense, prodigious, and cunningly displayed, which beautified the whole place, while projectors on the roof outside bathed all the neighbouring streets in a flood of perpetual light.

Then there was the telephone, which, hardly heard of at the time of the 1889 Exhibition, had become by 1900 a decisive factor in the life of the period. It had also bestowed an invaluable new property on the stage, while day by day its comic and tragic potentialities were being demonstrated in a hundred homes. By 1910 it had become a social necessity.

There is a peculiar fatality dogging the inventions of man. They are always designed to make life simpler for him, and they always, in fact, add to its complications. They are designed to minimize physical effort, and invariably they make it more and more urgent. They are designed to bring leisure and peace, and always they bring weariness and confusion.

We can count them all up and they all come to this. The telephone, which largely supersedes letters, meetings, and journeys; the lift, which spares us the trouble of climbing the stairs; the typewriter, which doubles our speed in writing; the motor-car, which doubles our speed in motion; and all those endless contrivances designed to save our time and labour—what have they all done but accelerate the rate at which we live and our expenditure of nervous energy and physical effort?

The life of the city is always quickening to a beat which,

unknown yesterday, will be surpassed to-morrow. The whirlwind of modern life has gathered momentum by 1910 and is already carrying all before it. In the streets preoccupied people scurry rapidly along; they leap across the road scanning it hastily as they jump before and behind their new juggernauts. Whether they are bent on pleasure or on business they hurry just the same. They rush everywhere—even on to death.

It is a dervish dance which racks the nerves, fractures the limbs, and atrophies the mind. Yearly it grows more and more intense until it dashes itself in fury against the immovable rock of war.

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The fashionable shopping quarter had shifted from the Boulevard des Italiens and the Boulevard Montmartre to the rue de la Paix and the Place Vendôme, which latter, a sombre and rather desolate square in 1880, has now become a centre of life and activity, with carriages piled up around the column and an elegant throng on the pavement before the Ritz.

For Paris had adopted the American fashion of lunching or dining one's friends in a restaurant. Beautiful women enveloped in furs descend from their victorias and enter the hotel, with its huge white dining-room in Louis-Seize style and electric lights all along the walls. The little tables are decked with flowers, and gaily coloured sun-blinds give an additionally festive air, while a czigane orchestra rocks the diners to a never-ending waltz.

It was delightful to be in Paris then!

A little way off, the rue Royale had also become a centre of fashion. Close by the Café Weber, Maxim's gathered a crowd of generous diners and gay ladies under the watchful eye of Cornuche. The American visitor was the mainstay of Maxim's; for him was reserved the proprietor's warmest welcome, and the pretty ladies' most dazzling smiles and most extravagant hats, and with him they danced on and on into the small hours.

The Champs-Élysées had also changed. Gone were the aristocratic residences which were still entrenched there

during the early years of the Third Republic. One by one they fell into the hands of the house-breakers, followed by builders who ran up enormous six-storied edifices with incredible rapidity. Fouquet's Café had just opened on the corner of the avenue de l'Alma, and thanks to its excellent bar soon became one of the centres of attraction to that still rather remote quarter. In the avenue itself the newly arrived plutocrat Dufayel had built an enormous house whose completion was solemnized by a reception which included the President of the Republic and Madame Loubet. The expansive Dufayel received his distinguished guests at the head of the grand staircase and took the President round to see the house. Pausing before one of the most hideous examples of new-rich taste he murmured in the President's ear: "There, that is my supreme effort. I have christened it the Loubet style."

Various theatres began to open round about the avenue des Champs-Élysées, and the thrust of Paris to the west became more distinctly marked. Soon Pierre Lafitte came there to install his new general offices, including the editorial departments of *Femina*, *Je sais tout*, and all the other papers associated with his name. Lafitte, as a key figure of the period, is worth a little attention.

He first appeared upon the Parisian horizon after the Exhibition of 1900 and sounded the clarion call which heralded a new standard of manners and taste in what it is now customary to call "society". This was his magazine, *Femina*, a periodical of hitherto unknown sumptuousness, launched with staggering publicity. *Femina* was much more than a mere fashion journal. The genius of M. Lafitte lay in perceiving two things. The first was that the actual participants in the pageant of Parisian social life were eagerly desirous of publicity and loved to see themselves and their friends in picture and print. The second was that outside this charmed circle existed an enormous public to whom the doings of the circle were so enthralling that they asked nothing better than to gaze upon the reflection of that expensive and animated world in the luscious and shiny pages of the new magazine. On one page they could see the Duchesse de Vendôme in her

private drawing-room; on another Lucien Guitry in his dressing-room or Lavallière in her bath. The following pages afforded them a glimpse of this distinguished painter attending to his grape vines, or that celebrated man-of-letters gathering shrimps, or that famous politician learning to box with Tristan Bernard. All garnished with succulent text and with numerous drawings of the latest authentic model fashions, with a story from the pen of one of the best-sellers thrown in. Such a galaxy at once found thousands of eager purchasers.

The man who launched this magazine became famous literally overnight. Paris swore by Lafitte, and his papers became the city's favourite reading. In their pages was mirrored the society which oscillated between the Riviera in winter, the capital in the spring, Trouville in the summer and the Basque coast in the autumn, dividing its leisure between tennis, the theatre, and the pursuit of fashion.

It was a world of dashing young sportsmen, charming ladies on horseback, and mature clubmen, 1905 vintage, with check trousers and spats. The women wore enormous befeathered hats and velvet dresses with guipure insertions, long gloves in summer, and voluminous muffs in winter. Such a world, where all the men were rich and dashing and all the women elegant, could not fail to ravish the suburbs of Paris and the remoter fastnesses of provincial France.

Pierre Lafitte was not content merely with the success of *Femina*; he launched successively *Je sais tout*, *Excelsior*, *Musica*, and *Fermes et Châteaux*, and all with the same good fortune.

His success was typical of those happy years just before 1914, years when nothing ever went wrong and when French society seemed to have reached the zenith of its elegance, wealth, and culture.

It was good to be in Paris then. On fine mornings, when the gay crowd of idlers thronged the avenue du Bois to take their "footing", as they were beginning to call it, where immaculately dressed men, pretty women on bicycles, and an occasional motor, still the subject of

curious stares, mingled with the throng of victorias, landaus, and riders on horseback.

Among the promenaders could always be found the two artists who have so effectively preserved for us the women of that period, so close, yet so far away. The long, sallow Helleu, etcher of slender, swan-necked beauties, and the little squat Boldini, portrayer of that dashing femininity, with its extravagantly tapering fingers and mandarin nails, so sweepingly set down that the subjects seem to be almost in flight on the canvas. Helleu and Boldini bore the reputation of possessing two of the most malicious tongues in Paris. "They dissected and devoured at least one mutual acquaintance per day," says Léon Daudet. "When the supply ran short, they fell on each other." Often they were joined by Sem, the favourite caricaturist of the period, who had the satirist's gift for seizing on the ridiculous in every face and figure. These three were an indispensable trinity at every Parisian spectacle. The morning found them in the Bois; the afternoon at a private view or reception; the evening at a first night or at the Opéra. In the summer they were to be encountered on the promenade at Trouville, in the winter at Nice or Cannes.

Most of the morning promenaders in the Bois converged on Arménonville or La Cascade, where it was fashionable to take the morning *apéritif*. Lunch became later and later, and very much shorter and less formal than the meal of twenty years ago. Men developed the habit of coming in their lounge suits and women kept their hats on.

The afternoon was taken up by calls, exhibitions, or private views. From two or three in the afternoon a frenzy of activity seemed to seize smart Parisians and whirl them on in a ceaseless round until well on in the small hours.

The *salon* still enjoyed much of its old popularity, and year by year the same crowd of the faithful thronged its floors. But "varnishing day" became less sought after; the ceremony was becoming more or less common with rival exhibitions increasing on every side.

The fashionable dressmaker of the period was much

more than a mere shopkeeper; he was an artist, a dictator, and an arbiter of taste. In no one figure are these characteristics so strikingly assembled as in that of Paul Poiret.

His audacities, his revolutionary innovations in colour and line, had made him and his creations world-famous. He was on the spiky pinnacle of fashion, surrounded by a world of snobs. His openings were important social occasions, his novelties were epoch-making and were the subject of endless and animated discussion all over the town and in all the newspapers, even abroad.

The fashionable dressmaker provided a sumptuous setting for his pronouncements; a magnificent orchestra, singers, dancers, and a lavish buffet. The models were introduced with Byzantine ritual; each was displayed on a girl of remarkable and appropriate beauty, and each bore a name evocative of passion, gaiety, mystery, or charm—all the emotions likely to arouse desire in feminine breasts. No wonder that the women flocked in.

The race meetings were, if anything, more brilliant than ever, and the classic occasions were further adorned by a battalion of beauties from the great dressmaking houses wearing the most striking styles. The stands were modernized and enlarged, but the whole setting at Auteuil and Longchamps was the same as it had always been within living Parisian memory. But, here as elsewhere, democracy had crept in. The levelling-down process had abolished the extravagances and eccentricities of yesteryear, and the carriage parade, which had once been so magnificent, dwindled down and down to an ever-decreasing muster of mail-coaches.

The red liveries of Count Potocki's grooms still stood out on the green lawns before a line of carriages, but now reduced to six or seven. After the war only two or three remained to remind Parisians of the glories of those days when fifteen or more coaches, including those of Gordon Bennett and Charles de la Rochefoucauld, would drive through Paris with their spirited horses, their horns resounding through the flowering chestnuts under a blue spring sky. Already in 1910 their image was fading.

Tea-shops, on the other hand, sprang up as if by magic. Those Parisians who were indifferent to gastronomy vied with each other in aping English manners and found themselves, round about five o'clock, in urgent need of toast and muffins. Some of these tea-shops reproduced faithfully the modest interiors of their prototypes across the Channel; others were larger, noisier, and more luxurious, and attracted round their tables battalions of chattering women and idle men, together with a large number of visitors.

This "tea hour" was something quite new in the life of the city; it marked the end of the day; it was at once a recreation and a pretext for gossip, and it satisfied the innate snobbery of those who always have to look somewhere else for social guidance. An irresistible current of Anglomania swept into French life and manners at this period, and, it must be regretfully chronicled, perverted them in more than one direction.

The nearer we approach to 1914 the more are we struck by the frenzied acceleration of social life and luxury, like the breathless final gallop of a grand quadrille the night before a catastrophe. Such fêtes as the Comtesse de Chabrillon's "Arabian Nights Ball", for instance, surpassed in splendour anything that the dazzling record of French entertainment can show. The dance went on faster and faster, whirling its intoxicated coryphés dizzy in the unending pursuit of pleasure, until the moment that Mars thundered on the gate.

If we look for one figure to evoke all this for us, it can only be Boni de Castellane's. He is the typical period piece, authentically signed and dated; the mirror of a generation. His aristocratic birth, his marriage to an American of fabulous wealth, his taste for the glories of the past, his showmanship, his understanding of the essentially modern "science" of decoration, his political ambitions, even his ability to learn from experience and to save himself by honest work from the wreckage of his fortune—all these things are the hall-marks of the period, not to be found in any of his prototypes, the D'Orsays, the Brummells, the de Sagans. His is the type which

above all others is summed up for us in the term "pre-war".

When Boni de Castellane married Anna Gould it was an event which filled the Press columns of two continents for weeks. When the young couple settled down in Paris, their *ménage*, their possessions, and their social appearances were the chief topic of conversation.

The rumour that the Faubourg St. Germain had black-balled them was set at naught by the invitations from the Duc d'Orleans and the Duc d'Aumale. Paris was soon to learn what a prodigality of artistic splendour its new magnifico could produce, and the fête given in honour of his wife's twenty-first birthday left the most sophisticated and experienced dazzled and breathless.

Boni de Castellane had rented a pigeon shoot in the Bois, and had had a stage of more than a hundred metres long erected by the lakeside, where eighty dancers from the Opéra ballet performed to an orchestra of two hundred musicians, their dancing silhouettes mirrored in the still water. The fountains played streams of coloured fire, and eighty thousand Venetian lanterns, like exotic fruits, hung among the trees, while myriads of lamps turned all the walks into shining ribbons of light. The fête was preceded by a dinner to two hundred and fifty people. Sixty footmen in scarlet livery spangled the green grass, and fifteen miles of carpet had been laid down.

It had become necessary to postpone the fête for forty-eight hours on account of the death of the Duchesse de Nemours, and on the evening before it actually took place a storm burst on the city. But the night itself was brilliantly fine, and under a sky powdered with stars the three thousand guests came out to gaze upon these marvels.

Camille Grouet conceived the idea of releasing twenty-five white swans at the moment when the fountains of fire began to play. Drawn by the light and bewildered by the noise, the unhappy creatures took flight and flew distractedly in all directions.

Nothing like this had been seen since the days of the Second Empire, and the name of Boni de Castellane took rank with those of the great satraps of the past.



He was actuated by nothing more than sheer artistic joy in composing such spectacles. When the President of the Municipal Council sent him the usual formal request to state "for what purpose" he was organizing a fête in the Bois de Boulogne, he replied, "For pleasure", leaving the official mind thunderstruck at the conception of any undertaking conceived without thought of utilitarian purpose or profit.

It was apparent that he belonged to another and more sumptuous age. He himself recognized it.

"Faced with an uncomprehending middle-class society" (he says), "I put myself deliberately back in the past, and there I composed for myself an existence of curious pageantry, beautiful women, and rare spectacles of every kind. I was an exile, not from my country but from my age, and so I have consoled myself by living the life of the past as much out of an urgent craving for beauty as out of distaste for the world which surrounded me."

In his famous house in the avenue du Bois no single detail was left unsuperintended; every angle of light and shade, every aspect of colour, had been foreseen, and every article of furniture thought out and placed. The result was an interior whose richness, beauty, and subtlety was the chief topic of conversation in all the drawing-rooms, all the clubs and in all the society papers.

It was recounted how, before the household moved in, the house was blessed by the Curé de Saint Honoré d'Eylau, in full canonicals with a retinue of choristers and priests, and how Boni de Castellane's first reception was to all who had taken part in the construction and furnishing of the house, from the famous painters and sculptors down to the carpenters and the plumbers. A lunch was served at a table twenty-eight metres long where all the guests sat down together in appreciation of the gesture.

Soon the lights went up in the great drawing-room and the house was ready for the admiration of Paris.

The long line of carriages extended as far as the Arc de Triomphe. Five hundred footmen were there to usher in

the guests as they crowded into the hall and mounted the great staircase, modelled by Desperrey on that of the Ambassadors at Versailles, between rows of powdered lackeys resplendent in purple livery with the Castellane arms. The crowd surged up with a loud murmur of excitement which swelled above the sound of the orchestra.

The master of the house was at the head of the stairs, "to observe", as he said himself, "their faces as they ascended". It is to be feared that envy and malice contorted a good many of them.

"The preoccupation, necessary if they were not to trip up and fall down the stairs" (he continued) "would at least delay for a little while the bitter comments which I knew only too well some of them would not be able to resist. . . .

"So little accustomed to splendour were my contemporaries that it seemed to go to their heads, and they behaved in our house in a way which they would never have permitted to themselves elsewhere. A comparative stranger one day stuck a pin into the calves of one of my menservants to 'see if they were real'."

These barely stifled criticisms, these acid remarks and all that vague floating cloud of jealousy had ample opportunities of crystallizing around the de Castellane *ménage* as its fantasies and extravagances increased. The purchase of the Château de Marais was marked by another outburst of prodigality, and as the prevailing colour in the decoration of the house was a delicate reseda green, the scarlet liveries which the servants wore in Paris was found to be discordant. So they had to be changed, and a livery of white and blue, combined with powdered hair, was substituted, giving the place the delicately faded aspect of an eighteenth-century gouache drawing, the age of blue and silver.

The park was the scene of innumerable gaieties and fêtes; illuminations lit up the fountains and the waterfalls, and retinues of carriages lined up along the drives. At the main staircase to the house was a janitor in a crimson cloak, and on first seeing him the Grand Duke Vladimir

asked, "Who is that Cardinal over there?" to which de Castellane replied, "Oh, he is only to make an agreeable scarlet patch against the white stone walls."

We are told that on receiving this reply the Duke regarded his host with a mixture of pity and admiration.

A magnificent stable under the supervision of Count Sapiéri was soon added to the property.

Meanwhile, in the house on the avenue du Bois the balls and the fêtes went on. Masses of flowers, myriads of lanterns, garlanded the place; tapestries, pictures, and *objets d'art* were purchased regardlessly with the prodigality of a Renaissance prince who would not deign to bargain. More than sixty million francs, on Boni de Castellane's own reckoning, were flung into the whirlpool of Paris.

Very soon the author of all this luxury became a public figure to the crowd. He was called "Boni" everywhere, and everybody pointed him out as he got down from his carriage. He figured in all the music-hall songs and in all the revue skits; he was on the pinnacle of notoriety.

He then began to display political ambitions. *Le Gaulois*, *Le Figaro*, and the *Revue des Deux Mondes* accepted his articles, and ambassadors and politicians began to frequent his table. Was he going to abandon his role as the premier showman of Paris in favour of becoming a national attraction? But, alas! his prodigality had alarmed his wife's family, and Paris awoke one day to learn of his divorce and total financial ruin. "After seven years of unparalleled opulence," he writes, "I found myself without a sou."

But he had too much spirit to be daunted by adversity, and the genuine knowledge of art and antiques and the experience which he had acquired in his past relations with the art dealers who had plucked him, enabled him still to make a living in a way where he could still enjoy the pleasures of beauty, now the only alleviation of his existence.

He lived on, but he was no longer the repository of the manners and taste of a period. The last of the dandies had abdicated without leaving a successor.

There was a man who might have inherited the role had he not flourished more or less at the same time. This

was the ineffable Count Robert de Montesquiou-Ferensac, precious, exotic, a little deliquescent, and influencing a narrower and much more exclusively artistic circle.

Montesquiou belonged to the gallery of eccentric spirits and original wits, and he arrogated to himself the role of major-domo of letters. Everything about him attracted attention—his ties, his gloves, the cut and colour of his coats, his art collection, his likes and dislikes, his stormy friendships, his portraits by Boldini and Whistler, and his authentic *grand seigneur* voice which turned the heart of Arthur Meyer into water.

He was typical of the opening of the twentieth century. He had never possessed anything like the fortune which Boni de Castellane had had to spend, but he was actuated by the same real love of beauty, the same ability in decorative assembly, the same assiduously cultivated taste for the past, mingled with something original and a little mad, which is the hall-mark of the poet.

His rooms were a riotous assembly of dissimilar objects—old family portraits, Empire furniture, Japanese *kakemonos* and Whistler etchings. The recurring *motif* of all his drawings, designs, and *objets d'art* was his favourite flower—the hortensia.

Les hortensias bleus,  
Les hortensias blous,  
De M. de Montesquieu,  
De M. de Montesquiou,

sang Jean Lorrain, who couldn't stand him. It was Jean de Lorrain who, in a description of Montesquiou's portrait in the current *salon* said, "He is flourishing a light cane, as if he is trying to make up his mind where to put it."

De Montesquiou expended enormous thought upon the dedications of his books. He wanted them to be original, fastidious, and erudite; he stood for the hyper-refinement of taste and for an allusive and fantastic style whose con-tortions were mimicked by Ernest La Jeunesse in the lines beginning:

Ave Caesar: morituri  
Te salutant. Mort? Ituril  
O! Ris! Tu ris? Mon Ituril  
Ris tu? Tu ris? Morituri,  
Triturant des enterrements. . . .

But however much they might imitate his literary style nobody could imitate the impact of his personality upon a certain social set. Tall and slender, with frizzed black hair, a salient nose, and a delicate moustache, he was an actor of genius and a most astonishing mimic. All his body came into play as he talked; he shook and quivered with excitement, his legs bent and straightened, his arms waved, and he seemed to have at least a hundred pairs of hands as the fingers were linked, bent, outstretched and clenched, modelling in the air and juggling with invisible objects. He expressed all his emotions—joy, anger, sorrow, amusement, appreciation—in his attitudes and gestures with the rapidity and fluency of an Italian mime.

When he was trying to sell something, he became the supreme impresario.

“He had” (says Boni de Castellane) “an extraordinary talent for presenting things to advantage. Once in my presence he was displaying to one of his women friends a hideous table inlaid with mother-of-pearl in the worst Second Empire taste, a glaring white object which would have shrieked in any surroundings. But he had hidden it behind a red curtain, and had placed upon it a crystal vase with one long-stemmed rose. With incomparable sleight of hand he withdrew the curtain, but delicately so that the piece of furniture was not entirely revealed at once. As he drew back the folds he began to talk about it, comparing its pearly whiteness to the skin of his visitor, its finely moulded feet with hers, and the perfume of the flower with her hair. All with such a wealth of simile and allusion that the lady fell for the thing immediately and could hardly rest until she had borne it off in her carriage.”<sup>1</sup>

But whatever Montesquiou could feign when it was a matter of picking up or of disposing of things, his depth of feeling for beauty was very real, and his terrifying storms of anger were nearly always aroused by the hideousness of something or somebody. He lashed himself into

<sup>1</sup> Boni de Castellane: *L'Art d'être paucvre*. (Cres.)

tremendous fury and suffered no check on his cruel tongue and devastating gift of repartee.

So striking a personality could not fail to arouse interest and curiosity, and if he never exercised the same sway over the fashionable world as Boni de Castellane he was nevertheless an original and outstanding figure who played his part with immense zest.

All these men crystallized a period of French taste which was represented in literature by Mallarmé and Verlaine, by the Impressionists and Gustave Moreau in painting, but particularly by a revival of the minor and decorative arts and crafts which enjoyed a period of unparalleled popularity. Furniture, silversmith's work, pottery, hand-wrought jewellery, etchings and engravings, were the rage with all those who aspired to be fashionable, for a love of the precious and the rare, a super-refinement of taste and a conscious aestheticism were characteristics of the period.

We have travelled a long way from the crudities of naturalism. Oscar Wilde and Burne-Jones, introduced to Paris by the Baroness Deslandes, were making disciples everywhere. The Comte de Montesquiou managed to combine all these tendencies in his own person, but fashionable women were content to concentrate on the artistic pose. They wore embroidered shawls, hair parted *à la* Botticelli, and carried flowers in their hands. Loudly on every side was proclaimed the dawn of the New Art.

This New Art had made its first encroachment into furniture and decoration at the Exhibition of 1900, and it flourished for about ten years under the title of "modern style".

It was not an evolution from any of the historic styles, but a definite break with them. It upset all the traditional forms and usages which had served for centuries and created a multitude of mysterious concealed cupboards, combined bookcase-divan-beds, and chairs as contorted and involved as one of Montesquiou's sonnets. It employed materials of no intrinsic beauty, bleak ash or pear wood copiously adorned with beaten brass, producing an effect at once bleak and tawdry.

The new interiors were hailed with joy by amateurs of artistic revolutions, but they did not find favour with the mass of the people, who preferred the forms hallowed by time and usage. But nevertheless the New Art had considerable influence. At least it succeeded in abolishing the fussy draperies and clumsy portentous furniture which had disfigured French drawing-rooms for nearly half a century. Light, space, and clear colour began to be appreciated; people learned to dispense with heavy *portières* embellished with fringes and tassels and with the clutter of bibelots on wall-brackets. The ornate black furniture, that uninspiring legacy of the Second Empire, disappeared completely and copies of Louis-Quinze and Louis-Seize furniture came into fashion.

The growth of public taste for miscellaneous antiques gave a great impetus to the army of restorers, fakers, and buyers and sellers generally. During the twenty years prior to the war a host of antique-dealers encamped in Paris, making a separate little world of their own, a world full of bargains, real and false, trickery, and clandestine commissions. The "modern style" did not hold out for long against the orgy of genuine and bogus eighteenth-century and Renaissance "pieces" with which the capital was flooded. Buying antique furniture became a fashionable amusement; smart people boasted of the bargains they had picked up, devoured catalogues, haunted sales in old houses and junk-shops in disreputable by-ways.

Those who owned old houses but had no furniture or antiques of their own, offered their houses to dealers as frames for the latter's wares, so that the sight of the things in their contemporary settings should excite the imagination of would-be collectors and send the prices up. This was known as "planting out furniture".

Prices began to soar to fantastic heights, for people would pay anything to gratify an aesthetic fancy. And the possibility of converting these purchases into cash was one of the major preoccupations of society on the eve of the Great War, when it could be no longer doubted that an unprecedented catastrophe was imminent.

CHAPTER XV  
THE EVE OF THE WAR

THOSE historians who state that the World War burst over Europe in 1914 like a sudden clap of thunder are gravely in error. In France, at any rate, the state of society during the five or six preceding years indicated plainly enough an anticipation of evil and unrest. All the characteristic premonitions of a great change were plainly to be discerned, and if the new generation which had arisen could not actually foretell the future, at least it sensed that it would be fundamentally different from the past. And the warning flashes of a conflagration coming from Austria and Germany had not entirely escaped public observation.

It is true that no disquiet seemed to trouble the ranks of pre-war society, which, as we have said, was never more brilliant than in those years from 1900 to 1914. Life seemed so pleasant and so easy then; science had bestowed so many concrete benefits on us, ideas circulated so freely; art and the appreciation of beauty seemed to be increasing on every side.

But underneath this appearance of wealth and tranquillity there were certain signs to be read, and most clearly in the disposition of the younger generation. Perhaps the most notable of these is the steady resurrection, as we approach the fatal date, of the patriotic idea.

During the years from 1889 to 1900 the conception of patriotism had progressively declined in inspiration. The unedifying spectacle of parliamentary corruption, the free circulation of disruptive opinion, the Dreyfus case, and the enormous influence of the Tolstoyian dream of world-brotherhood, and, finally, the definitely anti-militarist standpoint taken up by all the universities and the intelligentsia, had created a definitely pacifist and internationalist sentiment in almost all intellectual circles. Nobody except a few irreconcilables like Déroulède gave any thought to an actual military revenge on Germany; the nation as a whole had become quite resigned to the 1870 boundary-line.



This drifting indifference received its first jerk over the 1905 incident, from which must be dated the first revival of nationalist sentiment.

The incident was, in fact, grave enough. The Emperor William II had landed at Tangier, declared that the Moroccan question affected German interests, and demanded the dismissal of the Foreign Minister Delcassé under a virtual threat of war. And France had been obliged to give in.

The most optimistic internationalists were a little disquieted, but the young men of the country found the humiliation intolerable. And their bitterness and humiliation found expression in a new intellectual ferment. Ideas were debated as enthusiastically as in the days when Paul Adam and his generation devoured Bakounin and Karl Marx, but the ideas were very different. Once again the whole social structure of France was arraigned, but from a very different standpoint.

Two men had just emerged who were to exercise a very far-reaching influence over their contemporaries. They were Charles Péguy and Charles Maurras, and they were to shape the intellectual life of the next twenty years or more. Of the two, the latter has had a more widespread and permanent influence, but the former is the more picturesque personality, and he offers the more striking example of the evolution of ideas during the period from 1900 to 1914.

In 1900 Péguy was a little man with a square jaw and square shoulders, clad in a tight-fitting coat, hob-nailed shoes, and a soft hat, and wearing, through the winter, an enormous hooded cloak to keep out the cold. He was the typical poor student of the period, the rustic come to Paris, and he was then, of course, a Socialist, a reformer, and a disciple of Jean Jaurès.

"He was as methodical as a clockwork machine" (says René Johannet of him in those days), "and as sharp and undeviating. He never shrank from the consequences of his actions, however severe these might be."

This rustic apostle yearned to do something; he wanted

to put his mark on his generation. He contributed, of course, to the *Revue Blanche* and the *Revue Socialiste*, but he was already aware of that peculiar vision of his which made it imperative that he should have a platform of his own, where his ideas could be proclaimed without fear or favour. So he began the famous *Cahiers*, which were to become the intellectual pivot of a whole generation.

He had a little office on the ground floor at 16 rue de la Sorbonne, and there every Thursday came Daniel Halévy, the brothers Tharaud, Julien Benda, Jacques Maritain, and others now famous. The contributors also included Romain Rolland, although he did not come in person to the Thursday meetings.

Charles Péguy ruled his supporters with a rod of iron. He was, in fact, essentially a soldier and a believer. "There was always", as the Tharauds have said, "an exalted enthusiasm about him which gave a mystical quality to everything he undertook." At that time all his energies were taken up by the *Cahiers*, but later on he was to throw himself whole-heartedly into the attack on Jaurès, and upon the "evil professors of the Sorbonne", whom he accused of inculcating subversive and disruptive doctrines. Finally, he became immersed in the creation of *Notre Patrie*. All this time he was discarding his Socialism, and becoming more and more taken up with the revival of French nationalism.

But his patriotism, like his Catholicism, was a very personal thing. Daniel Halévy has said that he was at once a classicist, a revolutionary, and a Christian. A man of the people himself, he knew how to talk to them in that fervent and primitive imagery which they understand. None of his fellows had that particular gift of investing the patriotic idea with a religious quality. He was a violent partisan, entirely independent, and always a little unreasonable. He could no more suffer the strictures of some of his military supporters than those of the official religious hierarchy. And his peculiar influence lay in all these things.

His trend towards Catholicism began to show at a fairly early stage, and after *Le Mystère de la Charité de*

*Jeanne d'Arc* the rumour of his approaching conversion was the chief topic in literary circles.

His appearance had remained quite unchanged through all these years, and the ardent mystical Catholic was the same odd, rustic-looking little man who had come to Paris to sit at the feet of Jean Jaurès. His spiritual pilgrimage had taken him a long way from those days, and it was a pilgrimage which he was to mark out for many.

In the beginning his influence was exercised conjointly with that of Romain Rolland, whose *Jean Christophe* had just rallied sensitive souls throughout the world. Later on the two diverged into two very different philosophies, but their influence in the beginning coincided in that they made their appeal to the same fundamental disgust for contemporary bourgeois society, with its shoddy cleverness and vulgar standards, to the same instinctive yearning for the justifying ideals of Life, Work, and Conscience.

Men used capital letters then to dignify their ideals, and, indeed, these ideals have come to acquire an almost supernatural potency. It was a grave and serious generation, marching on to the unknown altar for which it was the ordained sacrifice, the generation which was to be immolated in the first year of the war.

To those ardent spirits who followed the mystical flame of Péguy were added the disciples who followed in the wake of the remorseless logician, Charles Maurras.

Unlike Péguy, Maurras was not a man of the people; he came of good upper middle-class stock with a long and honourable record of public service, bearing in its Mediterranean blood the inherent Latin respect for authority and law. He had had a seminary education, but was naturally indifferent to personal religion, since his cold, clear mind could only comprehend precise and logical forms. None could have been further removed than he from the mystical approach of a Péguy. There were no lyrical pæans in his argument, no appeals to those instinctive emotions that slumber behind men's minds. His remorseless logic descended upon muddled ideas like the steady, inexorable blows of a chopper.

This little dry, dark man, direct descendant of the

Roman colonizers, had attached himself to the Royalist party, and his vigorous dialectic had given it a new lease of life. Like Péguy, he, too, began to make disciples, and after first being associated with Hervé on the *Gazette de France*, he decided to form, with Vaugeois, Montesquiou, and Banville, a little review entitled *L'Action Française*. The leading spirits used to meet at the Café de Flore on the Boulevard St. Germain, a famous rallying-point of the younger generation.

The review did not satisfy Maurras, and on March 21st 1908 he converted it into a daily paper of the same name. He had now become associated with the turbulent Léon Daudet, and the era of violent campaigns was begun.

The next step was the formation of the Cercle Prudhon for the study of social questions. Then came the Institut d'Action Française, a sort of free university for inculcating and explaining the neo-monarchical theories advocated in the paper. Finally, the association of the Camelots du Roi proposed to enforce propaganda by action.

With this formidable equipment the neo-monarchists began to make themselves heard and felt. The Camelots du Roi constituted themselves a self-appointed "supplementary gendarmerie"; and made a number of dramatic interferences on various occasions.

The influence of Maurras upon the intellectual life of the younger generation was, however, largely counter-balanced by that of Georges Sorel, a former engineer who had once been prominent in the Thursday gatherings of the *Cahiers* group. But the doctrine which Sorel purveyed in *Reflexions sur la Violence* and *Illusions du Progrès* was a much higher explosive than the firework gunpowder of Péguy. As instances may be cited Sorel's two most important disciples—Mussolini and Lenin.

And yet it was entirely by words that he made his disciples, this disillusioned philosopher with the eyes of a dreamer. "Discourse was his battle-field" (says René Johannet); "and he would talk anywhere, in the street, at table, over the counter in a shop. Everywhere men gathered around him just to hear him talk." And he would talk about everything, the Dreyfus case, Socialism, Plato,

Plotinus, Poincaré, the Epicureans, War and Peace. Every subject he enlightened with his peculiar and original view, and the seeds which he flung into the air found a fruitful soil in which to germinate. Men were to be astonished later on at the influence of this timid, sensitive, and commonplace-looking little man, who was inconsolable for months because a temporary quarrel with Péguy had outlawed him from the sacred offices in the rue de la Sorbonne.

The young men who gathered round Péguy, Maurras, and Sorel had one trait in common which was to endure for several generations, and which we shall find still persisting after the war. They were realists in politics. It was not a realism which dealt in phrases and formulæ; it prided itself on looking everything straight in the face and on going straight on its way regardless of sentiment. All these young Frenchmen were brusque, sharp, and disillusioned. Agathon has described them admirably:

"In the past it was the fashion to idle through one's youth; students played around with ideas, wasted their years at the Universities, and cultivated a reluctance to make up their minds about anything, were it taking up a profession or getting married. But the new generation knows exactly what it wants and young as they are they set immediately out to do it. They find something morally necessary in earning their living, and they have none of that contempt for money which was fashionable among intellectuals yesterday. The simple philosopher who draws his own water from the well and lives on the handful of olives purchased with the price of half an hour's labour is not their ideal at all.

"At the age of twenty-five or even less many of them are fathers of families. It seems that this is part of their taste for the ordered and the permanent. A youthful liaison is a waste of time, they say, and in their optimism they mean that it is a waste of happiness. For their theory is that happiness can only be founded upon what is stable and enduring.

"This passion for order and stability, this horror of the experimental and the temporary, explains much

that seems revolutionary in the ways of the young. They are profoundly impressed by the gravity of certain aspects of life which their elders were accustomed to regard with light-hearted cynicism. It is not because their sensibility is keener, but because they wish to preserve it from experiences where the forces of sensuality and egotism alone are called into play."

Of course the growth of sport had played its part in all this. All these young men had been brought up to play football, with its insistence upon solidarity and discipline, and a year or two before the outbreak of the war sporting enthusiasm culminated in the establishment of an athletic training college at Reims.

France had just been beaten at the Stockholm Olympic Games of 1912, and the whole nation was agitatedly pondering the question which George Rozet had raised in *L'Opinion*: "How are we going to fare in 1916?" The answer to this was the foundation by the Marquis de Polignac of the athletic training college in the Pommery park.

Its setting was the rolling plain which leisurely mounts to the horizon to form the mountains of Reims. There were race-tracks, courses, and grounds for games of all kinds, the latest appliances for everything, and most luxurious baths.

The new generation, mad on physical development, fell on the idea with enthusiasm. It became fashionable to spend one's holidays there, to camp in the open, perform Swedish exercises with the utmost vigour and regularity, and to take "a complete physical cure", as the phrase went. The place was under the direction of a former naval lieutenant, and it was not only patronized by the young. Grizzled heads and even white were common among its frequenters.

It was only to be expected that the young men should be so powerfully drawn to physical exploits, for the air was literally full of the wonderful exploits of the aviators. The dreams of youth were full of far-off voyages and colonial expeditions, and a typical instance was the behaviour of Renan's grandson, Lieutenant Ernest Psichari, who threw up a promising career to lose himself in the African jungle.

Those who could not go so far off had to content themselves with "action" at home. "Action" was the keynote of everything, from the *Action Française*, which clogged the progress of Jaurès, to the crowd of enthusiastic youths who hung on the words of Marc Sangnier ready to manifest at any moment.

In *L'Opinion* Henri Massis and Alfred de Tarde, who under the joint pseudonym of Agathon were conducting an exhaustive campaign against the subversive teaching of the university professors, particularly those of the Sorbonne, were acquiring an immense influence over French youth.

All these movements had the same motive-force: the patriotic revival inaugurated by the articles of André Lichtenberger; the passion for sport, whose chief literary high priest was Georges Rozet; and the taste for modernity in everything so ably advocated by the unfortunate Raymond Guasco, one of the first to disappear in the inferno of 1914. Every one of them felt, however vaguely, that they were coming to the end of a certain order, that history was preparing to turn over a page.

How far was the instinctive prevision of these new writers, "the new brood", as Marcel Prévost called them, effective in stirring the mass of less articulate ordinary citizens? Undoubtedly these became infected with a general feeling that something was about to happen, and the tocsin of 1905 had reminded the country of the fact that the menace of war, which most people so hopefully believed to have disappeared, was stalking all the while behind the scenes of diplomatic courtesy and international agreements. Public opinion began to turn from Pichon and Clemenceau, and the Agadir incident of 1911 found all the people, with the exception of Jaurès and the Socialist group, solidly ranged behind the Government.

In his little book with the significant title of *The Renaissance of French Pride*, published in 1912, M. Étienne Rey has written the following:

"The martial spirit, that inheritance from our past, which we have for so long thought to be dead, has suddenly burst into flower by a magic germination, and

in a moment it has become, as in the days of the great military states, the motive force of the nation. This metamorphosis has been accomplished by the utterance of one single word—WAR. Before the threat of a new conflict our dissensions are healed, our cleavages cemented, and our army restored to affection and prestige. The French people has declared itself ready to face its destiny on the battle-field, and the moral force of this conviction has astonished the world.

"The man of arms has taken his revenge upon narrow idealogues and windy pacifists. All those outbursts against the horror of war have suddenly ceased, for once again men have come to realize the essential civil virtue of war, the exaltation which it induces in the spirit of mankind.

"The abiding right to fight for our integrity is again demonstrated to us, and we come to lose our belief in the virtues of weakness, in the shoddy humanitarianism inextricably tangled up with democratic progress. Let us be thankful that German arrogance has revealed to us in time the proper and salutary use of force, and the realization that without it no nation can maintain its integrity and its health. During these last years of great material prosperity we have acquired almost everything in the world save this, and without this, all the rest is nothing."

This rebirth of ideas abandoned for generations, this inner need for the salvation of action, found a concrete manifestation in the Presidential election of 1913.

Ten years before, the election would merely have excited the usual conventional polemics and parliamentary intrigues, but in 1913 it came out upon a wider field and aroused intense excitement throughout the country.

The two candidates seemed to symbolize in themselves the alternative paths which the nation could follow. On the one hand, Monsieur Pams, Clemenceau's candidate and generally supported by the Left, was a neutral and colourless figure, a suitable successor to the Loubets and the Fallières, the figure-head of a lax, easy-going, and flabby



régime, uninspired by great thoughts and incapable of dynamic action. The other, the representative of an Eastern department, was a blunt, energetic, and industrious man, upright and courageous, an expression of the new order to which men looked. In Poincaré the French saw a man who would break with the ignoble tradition of weakness, compromise, and defeat, a man who would lift up the heads of the people and make them feel that they were being governed. It cannot be said that the nation was drawn to him by any personal magnetism, but there was enough in him to satisfy those who looked for a sterner discipline and enough in him to frighten all the Left-wingers, all the grafters and the supporters of the Good Companions' Republic, and all those who were constitutionally opposed to any sort of change.

This gathering of feeling was sensed immediately by the experienced nose of Clemenceau, who lost no time in proclaiming his candidate with that intimidating violence which had hitherto served him so well.

It was a hot fight, bitterly contested amid great public excitement, and when it was finally declared in favour of Poincaré everybody felt that a new era was inaugurated. There were crowds in the street on the night of the election and enthusiastic demonstrations in favour of the new President. The rage of Clemenceau knew no bounds, but all over the country there rose a great wave of confidence and hope.

The stormy discussion on the three years' service and the excited parliamentary sittings which followed gave tangible demonstration that the country was persevering in its new path. The months immediately preceding the outbreak of the war bristled with tumultuous complications; the rhythm of life was rising in an infernal crescendo of tragic events. The Caillaux affair on the one hand and the Humbert revelations on the other riveted the attention of the scandal-loving and the serious alike, while throughout that brilliant summer Parisian society revelled and junketed on an unparalleled scale. But the shadow of the storm, the cloud now larger than a man's hand, crept menacingly over the dazzling scene.

## CHAPTER XVI

1914

AND SO we come to August 1st 1914, that fateful date whose memory oppresses us still. Those who lived through those first hours will remember them always, moment by moment, as the tragedy unfolded.

The Austrian trouble, the ultimatum to Serbia, the diplomatic *pourparlers* and the first flamboyant articles in the Press, the opening bars of the monstrous symphony. And steadily there arose the sound of the uprising people, a tremor that shook the earth like the vibration of a machine at full speed approaching relentlessly from the distance.

It was the end of July, and the holiday season had begun. The railway stations were crowded with care-free people who scanned the papers perfunctorily as they waited for their trains to go off. Ultimatum? Serbia? Germany? How could it be in this magnificent summer, at the time when the whole world cried off work and when political and social activity was invariably suspended by common consent? "Newspaper talk!" And they shrugged their shoulders.

But as the facts became known and the sequence of events developed, Paris began to take alarm. There were groups of people around the newspaper kiosks reading the papers anxiously, and the evening issues were snatched up as soon as they appeared.

At last there was no doubt. It was War knocking on the gates. The word was in the air and on everybody's lips; it kindled men's spirits and quickened their pulses, and already it filled some eyes with tears.

Then on the 1st of August it came, like an awaited thunderclap.

Towards the end of a magnificent summer day, about five o'clock, with the sun just beginning to climb down the sky, the little white mobilization notices appeared. And before the working day was over the news had spread

to the city's remotest corners. Men stopped working hastily, and said, "So it's here."

An immense crowd gathered in the streets, massing, drifting, breaking up, and coming together again in greater numbers. Organized bands carrying flags appeared, and the "Marseillaise" rose to every man's lips and burst out like a fanfare of trumpets.

Then came the attacks upon the German, or alleged German, business houses, the shattering sound of breaking glass, the looting of shops, and the molestation of suspected enemy nationals. But as the evening drew on Paris became calmer and graver. Shops put up the shutters which in many cases were not to be taken down for four years; uniforms that had not seen light for years appeared on the street; men linked arms and embraced each other, while others marched in slow file side by side. Passing by doors in quiet streets you could hear the sound of sobbing inside.

At the corner of the street the old shoemaker was hammering away ceaselessly, knocking in the huge iron nails of the soldiers' shoes. The sound beat on like the leitmotiv of the unquiet night.

Women passed by arm in arm with their men-folk, laughing and shouting gaily, "Don't forget to send me William's moustache."

Once again the sound of the "Marseillaise" approached, this time chanted from the full throats of a bareheaded group about to depart.

Cars streaked like lightning along the suddenly emptied streets. They were already full of soldiers in war kit, a memory which we can never again forget.

The night which had fallen was so warm and fair, full of the scents of summer and with a sky sown with stars. Paris stirred and took a deep breath of all this, as if for the last time. To-morrow a new life was beginning; our old one had been stopped short as a running tap is cut off with a sudden turn of the wrist. A catafalque of more than night closed down upon the city.

. . . . .

The first tranced moment passed, and public opinion reasserted itself with extraordinary rapidity. To smash the windows of German shops might satisfy certain instincts for an hour or so, but, as the philosopher said of indignation, it was hardly a political weapon. As soon as the appalling urgencies of the moment were borne in upon the people the street disorders immediately stopped. There were many who at first could not realize, but little by little the whole nation came to understand. During four years the war was to lie upon us as a nightmare weighs upon your chest, and turn as you may you cannot be delivered. Or like a coat of mail encasing you from chin to heel so that you cannot move or turn without feeling its presence. For this war was without precedent in history, a war in which every one of us was in some way to be caught up.

But in those first delirious and incredible weeks the paramount sentiment was curiosity. It showed itself in a hundred fashions. Masses of people crowded the stations to see the troops go off, especially at the Gare du Nord and the Gare de l'Est where huge barriers were put up to facilitate the incessant flow of the mobilized, who passed through them unendingly day and night as though snapped up by a trap.

Then there was the problem of the reservists, called up from heaven knows where, drafted all over the place, hanging about in unoccupied groups by the schools or other buildings converted into temporary barracks for them.

And already in certain places foreign officers had begun to arrive. The first Belgian and English troops had created great excitement in the north, and anxious English military officials were going from place to place on the innumerable missions connected with the thousand and one problems which the military co-operation of two nations involves. The first two English officers to appear in Bourges, where they had gone to inspect an armament factory, were greeted loudly with: "You see the Russians are here already. We'll make short work of the Boche."

But public curiosity was most actively concerned with the political situation and the paucity of news, for the

editorship had been rigidly established at one swoop and the papers could publish nothing but colourless official reports which deceived nobody.

For the first fifteen days the public rushed to buy papers, any papers and all papers. "Doesn't matter what's in it," said the newsboys as their wares were snatched out of their hands, "as long as it's a paper it goes." Some enterprising vendors chartered taxis which they stuffed full of *Intransigeants* and plied around the remoter suburbs in the hope of selling them at a premium. As a matter of fact they rarely got past the fortifications before they were raided and sold out.

The Swiss newspapers enjoyed most remarkable prosperity, for the certainty of being able to read, in the *Journal de Geneve*, the enemy communiqués so sedulously suppressed by the censorship at home, had the advantage of keeping the public informed combined with the feeling, always so dear to Frenchmen, of going behind the back of authority.

Other targets for public curiosity arose all round. In Paris there was the sight of the Bois turned into a huge cattle ground, the strange hush in the streets by day and the total darkness by night (ordered since the first alarm of enemy aircraft) and the spectacle of women working on the Métro. In the ports there was the mobilization of the Fleet, and in the frontier towns the constant stream of migrants. In other more secluded places people came out to watch motor-lorries dropping their cargoes of suspects into the internment camps for enemy aliens and undesirables. On every side the unescapable presence of War revealed itself in a thousand and one unexpected details.

Throughout the country, the sudden mobilization had created the utmost confusion in all trades and professions. Men had been taken from the fields, from the workshops, the counting houses and the banks, and daily and hourly problems and difficulties were presented for rough and ready solution.

It need hardly be said that there was absolutely no provision for the war behind the lines and people were helpless in front of unprecedented situations. There were

shops with no one to serve in them, trams and trains with no one to drive them, and important business houses with no one to direct affairs. Many municipal departments and public institutions were left with only the chief and an office boy to deal with the crowds who surged day and night around their enquiry bureaux.

All these things had to be taken in hand at once; substitutes had to be found somewhere; registers of civilians were made out, and men were allocated to positions and places where they might serve; taxes and duties had to be collected, harvests to be gathered in, factories for the making of primary necessities to be kept going. Somehow or other the communal daily life had to be carried on at whatever cost to the individual comfort, and this hard necessity was accepted by every one not merely with resignation but with an active enthusiasm engendered by the sense of the national danger. Men and women worked together with tireless courage; aged peasant women laboured all day in the fields; old men and children wheeled carts and drove ploughs; even the halt and the lame came out to give their clumsy aid. The nation worked together as one man.

Gradually there began to emerge among the publicists certain well-defined states of mind which were to persist throughout the duration of the war.

The first clarion call, soon to degenerate into a ridiculous slogan, was Service.

"Every one must serve, no matter how" (said the papers). "Every one must serve however he can and wherever he may chance to be. It does not matter what you do, but you must do something."

Advice like this, excellent as it may have been in itself, was in the circumstances superfluous, for ever since the first days of mobilization a perfect frenzy for "doing something" had seized all the men, and still more the women, of the capital.

Numbers of women, unable to discriminate between activity and service, embraced the most unsuitable occupations. Women who had never seen an agricultural

implement wanted to do harvesting; women who could barely drive enrolled as chauffeurs, and others who had never held a needle in their lives sat down to make garments for soldiers' children. Some cleaned out barracks and Army trucks, while others installed themselves at desks covering official forms with their best writing.

I can remember encountering one lady, in a very smart cowboyish turn-out with expensive leather gauntlets, piling various implements on a minute cart with the help of an ancient maid. Asked what she was doing, she proudly replied:

"I am going to cart these picks and shovels to the front, as I hear they are digging trenches there. I've got all the permits and you'd never believe the trouble I had to get them."

This curious state of mind was more particularly noticeable in Paris; in the provinces women did not so completely lose their common sense. But even in Paris it did not last very long. Gradually it dawned upon even the most ardent that the war had come to stay for a very long time, that it was a matter for endurance rather than action, and that the best thing they could do was to get used to it.

Only the knitting craze remained. Paris turned out vests and pants and socks by the million. Needles clicked everywhere—in buses, in trains, in teashops, and in theatres. The more ardent knitted actually while the play was in progress and not merely in the intervals.

When the first outbreak of excitement died down, it was succeeded by a curious docility, quite without parallel in our history. The most catastrophic disasters were received silently and without public demonstration. After the first hysterical anti-German riots and the attacks on one or two Austrian speculators on the Bourse, the declaration of war provoked no acts of civil violence, with the exception of the murder of Jaurès, which was an individual affair. There were no processions in the streets, no noisy crowds demonstrating before the Ministries, no disorders of any kind. A kind of fatalism seemed to atrophy the whole civil population.

Nothing that the fearful unfurling of the panorama of 1914 to 1918 revealed seemed to destroy this quietude. Neither the disaster of Charleroi, nor the threat to Paris, neither the Battle of the Marne nor the hecatombs of Verdun, neither the breaking of the front line during the last frenzied German offensive, nor even the final victory, provoked any of those scenes of tragedy or joy or any of those terrifying outbursts which have continually marked our history.

That the Government should have congratulated itself upon the national phlegm was only to be expected. But that the state of mind should have appeared at all, and that it should have continued right down to the present day, is much more remarkable. Is it a fact that a profound inner transformation has been worked on the national character? Have we exchanged restiveness for indifference and a dull fatalism for our old unconquerable spirit of opposition?

It is a curious psychological problem which has never, so far as I know, been hitherto analysed. Incredible as it may seem, patience became the most typical quality of the French. Throughout those four fatal years the mistakes of governments and generals passed apparently unheeded by those long queues of people lining up for everything—bread ration, coal ration, relief; sending parcels, trying to get news. The eternal defile before an official grille is our most abiding souvenir of war-time behind the lines, from one end of the country to the other.

It was a tragic defile in some places. In the poorer parts of the town, after the first mass invasion of refugees, the people would hang around all night, women with children in their arms, sitting on the ground, waiting for news, leaning against the walls, passing round rumours and airing their grievances. Yet there would be no general agitations, no outbursts, hardly a voice raised.

Sights like this which seemed so pitiable at first soon became quite normal.

It must be conceded that very formidable machinery had been employed to reduce public excitement. For instance, the censorship of the Press had been accepted



from the outset without any organized resistance. There had been vehement individual protests, such as Clemenceau's, but they found no echo in the public mind. *L'Homme Enchaîné* got no more readers than *L'Homme Libre*. And although the censorship was often caught out in absurdities the public, with exemplary docility, pretended not to notice. People preferred to keep their ears shut than to open them to a hideous reality.

Apart from the official censorship the newspapers received various instructions from the powers that were; polite admonitions to preach patience, resignation, and calmness to their readers. Never has the *perinde ac cadaver* of the Jesuits been so honoured as during those fatal years: see nothing, hear nothing, imagine nothing, and believe nothing, outside the official communiqués. Wait on your destiny and bear all things with the smiling face of the Christian who knows that his eternal crown is on the other side. For "the eternal crown" read "the ultimate victory"!

Some zealous persons went further and cultivated optimism to the most ridiculous extent. Everything in their view was happening for the best. "Joffre beaten back?" So much the better: he would be in a stronger position. "Lille taken?" So much the better, too costly to defend. "Impossible to force the Dardanelles passage?" So much the better. This type of mind would, in fact, have blandly resigned the whole country to the Germans as long as there was one corner left from which they could prophesy a sensational come-back to-morrow.

Finally, this attitude was clamped down upon the people by the Government's reiterated assurance, in face of cumulative misfortunes, that every loss and depredation suffered by a French citizen would be made good. "Germany will pay" became the formula which deadened the emotions of wronged and suffering people, driven from their homes and despoiled of their goods. It is useless for us to emphasize the wicked futility of the phrase, and all the brazen swindles, bungling schemes, and wasteful extravagances which it inspired and was held to justify. It is a formula which has never worked when applied to a country which

has been the actual theatre of war. It is with our own labour and with our own money that we have repaid ourselves.

But if the French became the most docile of peoples they remained still the most loquacious, and tongues clacked ceaselessly everywhere. The great army of talkers was divided into the two classic camps—the optimists and the pessimists. Almost before the first shot was fired the division was marked out. “War will break out,” said one lot, and “Not on your life,” said the others. “It’ll all be settled at the last minute.” And then, when it was not, they said: “Well, so much the better. We shall get rid of a nightmare. If we’ve got to go, let’s get on with it.”

That was a sentiment common to both parties, the difference being that the optimists were certain we were going on to victory while the pessimists were sure that we were marching to defeat.

As a rule the pessimist was the better informed of the two. The optimist was content to keep a stiff upper lip in the face of adversity; he sought to convert more by example than by argument. Once and for all, he had reasons for looking on the bright side which were good enough for him, and he wasn’t going to bolster them up by any damned arguments. He neither advanced nor retired, and in the long run he was proved to be right. And although he never said anything more than “I told you so”, that most exasperating of statements put the finishing touch to the pessimist’s discomfiture.

The peculiar characteristic of the pessimist was that he managed to achieve a state of almost perpetual motion. Wherever he was, working, talking, or reading, his brain searched feverishly for fresh fuel for his arguments and worse ills to presage. When he had succeeded in finding them, which he invariably did, he rushed off to deposit them at the feet of the optimists. The mistakes of the Allies—and God knows there were enough of them—the shilly-shallying, the hesitations, the lack of initiative and the blunders were seized upon by him with startling alacrity and savage joy. The wartime pessimist displayed a sort of genius in his incessant research for any bad luck

that might be waiting for us in any corner of the world. Five minutes' conversations with a soldier on leave sufficed to reveal to him that the troops were badly fed, that they had all had enough of it, that there was a shortage of munitions and that the number of the dead was appalling. Give him ten minutes with any officer above subaltern's rank and he would gather that the command was disorganized and the plans completely overthrown. From a quarter of an hour with any deputy he would glean that the Government were prepared to accept peace at any price, and two days in the country provided him with incontestable proof that we were on the verge of famine. If he went over a factory he discovered that the workmen were disaffected and that social revolution was imminent; if he met a sailor he would certainly come back with the news that England was being blockaded. Wherever he went and whomever he met, he gathered disaster; he smelt it from afar off; he felt it in his bones.

And he kept it up till the very end. The Armistice did not muzzle him, for he was already prophesying the worst possible peace. He foresaw Bolshevism, bankruptcy, and the cession of our colonies, and to-day he is still busy discovering fresh woes.

Another much more pestilential type was the disseminator of false news. The ingenious and patient author could compile a whole volume of very curious reading from the false rumours which were systematically circulated throughout the country from 1914 till the end of the war. Right down to the end of the war, perhaps even now, there were still people who believed Japanese troops came across Scotland via the Arctic Ocean, that the big guns which bombarded Paris were operated by spies from St. Denis, and that the Pope had given a secret audience to the Kaiser.

No mystery attaches to the transmitters of these rumours. They were transmitters pure and simple, acting without calculation under the sway of the peculiar hypnosis of false news. Even the temperamentally incredulous could not escape the obsession and repeated the absurdities they heard just like every one else. Part of the

strength of these rumours lay in the fact that at least they broke the monotony of the dragging days. They were almost as good as an actual happening to men living for years in expectation of things which never came off.

This impression of a never-ending march induced that state of boredom which was, in the ultimate analysis, the characteristic state of mind behind the front. The eternal shuffle obtruded on the consciousness of even the busiest and least impressionable men. It irritated them, harried them, drove them together. Out of it was born that taste for blatant amusement displayed by all the soldiers on leave; out of it came the multiplication of dance halls, noisy musical shows and breathless and strident diversions. It was this also that doubled and trebled the army of feverish cigarette-smokers, and which drove others who had never hitherto read a line to bury themselves in enormous books. Boredom, apathy, a stolid resignation in the face of disaster, an immense moral lassitude and a total absence of exaltation—these are the characteristics which seem to us most marked among all the non-combatants throughout the World War.

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The two things that most powerfully affected public opinion were, first, the departure of the Government for Bordeaux, and second, the arrival of the refugees.

The flight to Bordeaux, modestly designated as "the response of the Government of the Republic to the order of the Supreme Command", was not regarded as a display of panic outside the official world, always too well informed and always apprehensive of the worst. The general public simply took advantage of an improved train service to send their women and children away from the capital. "One little lot less for the Prussians," they said as the train went out. Those who had prided themselves upon their unflinching patriotism found various disingenuous reasons to explain their departure, and when mutual acquaintances met, as they often did, on the promenade at the same "safe" watering-place, the comedy was admirably carried out:

"What, you here?"

"Yes, there didn't seem to be any point in changing our plans. You see Edward isn't fit for service and he has gone to Vichy as usual, and we, as you know, always come here."

"Exactly the same with us. After all, there's no point in interrupting your usual way of living if you can't help. . . ."

It was a lucky thing for these gentry that the war elected to break out at such a suitable date.

But the truth was that a number of people were afraid, as the railway goods trains could bear eloquent witness. All along the Paris-Orleans route were long trains of trucks, roughly provided with benches but entirely inadequate to the number of the occupants, many of whom sat on trunks or packages, or on the floor. Nobody knew when they were leaving or when they were arriving, and they were not very much better informed about where they were going. There they were jammed together in the jolting trucks, doing thirty miles an hour at most. Sometimes they would be halted for hours in the middle of the open country, and the more sanguine spirits would climb out to pick flowers and look round the landscape, to be recalled precipitately by the sudden whistle of the engine about to start off again. They ate, drank, slept, smoked—and talked about the war.

They were all assured of the final victory. Happily nothing was ever able to dislodge that magnificent certainty from the public mind. But, meanwhile, things might be uncomfortable.

After hours of jolting and creaking they would arrive at a station, in the early hours of the morning. Some one would unbar the heavy door.

"Where are we?"

"Bourges," replied the station master.

"Bourges? How far's that from Paris?"

"Too far for the Germans to come and find you," said the understanding official.

"Well, let's get out here."

"Not me," cried a voice inside. "There's a big armament factory here."

"Is there, damn it? Well, let's go on a bit farther. What about Perpignan? That ought to be all right."

So they all clambered back again.

In the November and December of the same year the migrants came back, almost as uncomfortably as they had set out. Crowded carriages with all classes mixed up together, men reading the papers out loud, gendarmes, baskets of provisions, baggage of all kinds.

But the Government remained at Bordeaux, where were also installed all that section of society which revolves round the parliamentary world and the newspaper offices. After the sudden alarm and the rather precipitate voyage, they were all immensely relieved to find themselves so comfortably together again. Confidence returned, and even a measure of social gaiety. They tried the local cuisine and found it good; they gave little receptions and dinner-parties, growing in number and elaboration. They did at last, settle down to work, but the fact remains that those who were installed at Bordeaux had a very good war. The rumour of these little dinners and parties and of those capacious pockets that were being so comfortably lined began to filter through to Paris. It percolated all through France, losing nothing in the process, and rapidly became a legend.

"They do themselves well down there," growled disgruntled and rationed Parisians.

And "He was at Bordeaux" became an established insult.

The Government soon realized that it had made a blunder in obeying the military edict so dutifully. Its return to Paris was as inglorious as its exit.

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A much more poignant spectacle than the flight to Bordeaux was the influx of refugees from the invaded territory. There was hardly a town in France that did not witness it.

The pitiable troop began to pour into Paris after the first few weeks. They found lodging wherever they could; in the hotels, which were already full to bursting, in the

old Saint-Sulpice Seminary, in commandeered buildings, and in night shelters. Later on it was found necessary to divert them to the provinces, but those who had tasted the delights of Paris were loath to depart. Many, of course, had found opportunities of work that had never before been open to them.

Refugees, like exiles, have a characteristic state of mind. The miracle—once again—was that they did not protest with more rancour and violence, for many of them had lost everything. People did what they could to alleviate the distress, and the relief funds were constantly augmented. Many of the refugees who found work loyally contributed to the support of their less fortunate fellows. For the most part they displayed that industry and tenacity which characterize the rather dour folk of the Northern and Eastern departments.

We can recall some touching cases that came within our own purview. There was one woman refugee from a Northern department whose husband had been mobilized within a few hours of the declaration, and who had had to fly at once with her children without time to take away more than a few thousand francs sewn in her blouse. The family had been very prosperous, the husband having owned a chain of local shops.

The poor woman arrived in Paris with the crowd of refugees, with no friends and no knowledge of the capital, and found a position at length as assistant in the municipal offices of a working-class quarter, where her job was to hand out coal-tickets to needy applicants. All day long she worked alone in an enormous room perpetually invaded by loud-mouthed haridans, exasperated by war-time restrictions and privations, who threatened to submerge her every minute.

One day, through some administrative muddle, the coal-tickets did not arrive and the unfortunate woman was physically assaulted by the bellowing furies, who clawed at her and spat in her face. With magnificent calm, however, she declined the assistance which was sent to clear the room, and faced her assailants without flinching. She dominated the assembly by sheer will, but when the last

virago had departed she collapsed in a paroxysm of sobbing. We learnt then that she had heard only that morning that her husband had died in captivity.

Such recitals could be furnished by the thousand. They demonstrate not only the fortitude of the refugees but also the persistence with which, even under the cloak of the all-pervading apathy, the French continued to encourage their everlasting internecine rancours. This was plainly shown by the alacrity with which accusations of cowardice or espionage were hurled at any apparently youngish man who was not in uniform. Clemenceau put himself at the head of this curious movement, and the harrying of "slackers" became almost a national pastime.

At the town hall mentioned previously we heard a matron from Belleville reviling a one-armed employee who had not attended to her quickly enough, and shrieking out that he was a shirker and a coward.

Somebody pointed out that the man was a soldier who had lost an arm.

"Well, what about it?" she screeched. "My old man's lost both!"

By the end of 1914 it became apparent that the Frenchman's ideal, whether he was in or behind the lines, might be set out as follows:

"All the combatants to be of the same rank, in the same trenches situate in the same place and receiving at the same time the same wound in the same part of the body."



## CHAPTER XVII

### CARRYING ON THE WAR

THE return of the Government to Paris and the establishment of a more or less fixed line of trenches marked the fact that the war was passing into its second phase. It was now a matter of common knowledge that it was going to last for many months, perhaps even for years, as the English maintained, and that social life had got to be adapted to it. Business must be carried on "as usual".

Those women who had been the first to proclaim the need for universal service with so much excitement and hysteria were the first to abandon their nurses' uniforms and their mechanics' overalls and to take up the life which they had so summarily abandoned. They were content to buy their ration cards and to practise strategy on the more limited domestic field, but with just the same vehemence. There were, of course, plenty of devoted women who faithfully carried on the work they had undertaken in 1914, but those who had made most noise about it faded very quickly out of the military scene.

The first evidence of the new state of affairs was that the theatres reopened. The Comédie Française was one of the first to resume activity, and it opened triumphantly with Corneille's *Horace* before an audience quick to rise to the topical implications of the tragedy. The Opéra did not lag behind, and Mademoiselle Chenal began to sing the "Marseillaise" which she was doomed to reiterate for four long years. One by one all the theatres came to life again.

The Government raised no objections; on the contrary, it approved entirely. For the artists had to live, and money had to circulate if there was to be any available for rates and taxes and loans. And the lucky possessors of Paris leave must be given some compensating pleasure for their sufferings and privations.

This regular system of leave was one of the rare happy ideas of the High Command. Rivers of ink had flowed on

the subject, and the soldier on leave is still one of the most vivid memories of the time. His return created immense excitement among his friends and neighbours; everybody with the slightest acquaintance came to see and to question him. They bore it all with touching modesty, these men temporarily reprieved from the hell of the trenches for so short a period; these men who had suffered so much and who had yet so much more to suffer. They established a kind of moral liaison between the front line and the non-combatants, more powerful than any correspondence, however intimate and regular. And their presence comforted others as much as it heartened themselves.

There were some tragedies. The temptations which their wives experienced during those long absences, the necessity, often, of earning their daily bread in unconventional ways, the thousand and one ruptures of the beloved routine of the peaceful years so ardently yearned for by the men cut off from it—all these things caused shocks, disappointments, and bitter surprises. Some men went back to the front sadly disillusioned.

It will not surprise those who have followed the trend of public opinion to learn that the first sign of reviving life in the world of amusement should be an enormous growth in the popularity of the musical comedy. During the years immediately preceding the war it had held its own, but no more, with newer and more original entertainments; but with the outbreak of hostilities it again mounted the pinnacle of public favour. The men on leave demanded light music, more light music, and nothing but light music. And the people behind the lines, with the crowd of neutral and Allied nationals already residing in Paris, were well content to second them.

It is quite futile for moralists to censure this taste as ignoble. It was perfectly natural that men who had been playing a part in one of the most dreadful spectacles of human history should not desire to re-encounter bloodshed and strife behind the footlights. They had no taste for vicarious carnage. They wanted singing, dancing, light comedy or even crude farce, and the stimulant of a perpetual rhythm to beat down consciousness.

The dancing craze had not yet come, but it was well on the way; and the jazz band, its formidable ally, was already making its first stammering assault upon the citadel which after the war it was to conquer so completely. Already in private houses couples were trying out the one-step and the tango to the accompaniment of the new syncopated music, with its strident notes, its wails and its rumblings, its monotonous assault upon the senses.

On the stage, as we have said, musical comedies and revues had it all their own way. They were played nightly to crowded and enthusiastic houses which included as many uniforms as civilian coats. In the passages and foyers the wounded and mutilated elbowed more fortunate heroes, and the brief moment of pleasure gained an additional savour by contrast with the fate which waited on them.

The afternoon performances were more crowded than the evening, for the suspension of the omnibus services and the dearth of taxis made it well-nigh impossible to get about Paris by night. Night-time in Paris during the war was a sight never to be forgotten by those who saw it. As the threat from enemy aircraft increased, the street lights grew fewer and dimmer, until at last the whole town was plunged into virtual darkness. There were no friendly lights streaming down from the windows, no lamps along the streets; and no car dared to show its headlights. Nothing revealed the presence of the great city to the hostile sky, and one might almost have thought oneself back in the Paris of three centuries before. Under the frosty skies of the winter of 1917, or in the star-swarmed nights of the following spring, the buildings reared up out of the formidable shadow while the gardens stood out luminously like blobs of Chinese white. The streets, almost entirely empty after seven o'clock, gave an impression of utter desertion, a gargantuan Appian Way.

Sometimes the appearance of the enemy aircraft would shatter the silence of the night, but on the whole these raids, which were most frequent during the last year of the war, did not do any serious damage, and the bombardments of the long-range guns were too infrequent and

spasmodic to cause much alarm. The military authorities found it easy, thanks to our newly discovered characteristic of docility, to impress the necessity of taking cover successfully on the population, and the newspapers, with that co-operation which they manifested so unfailingly in matters of this kind, exhorted their readers to obey the special orders. It became the first duty of every patriot to rush for shelter as soon as the warning sirens were heard. It was a new method of serving one's country, and it was avidly taken up by all the same women who had rushed in as temporary nurses, soldiers' godmothers and knitters of perpetual socks. It was no use trying to tell these people that the actual risks of these air-raids were negligible; that many of them were, in fact, abortive; and that one was much more likely to get something undesirable from being shut up in an underground cellar with a miscellaneous crowd of all sorts and conditions. They would only reply with a scornful look which stamped you at once as a bad Frenchman—a spy, even.

The public will follow any lead like sheep, and hence there occurred, in the more crowded and poorer quarters, those lamentable spectacles of old and infirm people carried out on their mattresses down to the chilly concrete cellars, where they were jostled and walked over by crowds of factory girls and urchins keeping up their courage by bawling out the latest popular songs.

But although business might be as "usual", there were certain general restrictions imposed upon the nation. It is true that the bread and sugar tickets did not provoke public disturbances any more than the restriction of restaurant meals to two courses, but the habitual indiscipline of the French induced numbers of people to expend immense ingenuity in various shifts to get their rations increased. The attempt to "wangle" extra sugar became a recognized and immensely popular national sport.

There were all sorts of stories about the hoarding of provisions. There was the well-known tale of the woman who had filled her bath with sugar, until an inadvertently released plug gave the game away. Anonymous letters

flowed in upon the harassed officials, and certain factions loudly demanded a house-to-house search for hoarded provisions.

The bitterly severe winter of 1917-18 raised a much more serious problem, that of the shortage of coal. By a combination of circumstances—the commandeering of goods trains and the inability of boats to come up the Seine—the citizens found themselves unable to obtain even the meagre fuel ration allotted to them, and the whole city turned out in a mad quest for coal. Elegantly dressed persons might be seen carrying with infinite care a little bag of coal not much bigger than a packet of chocolates. To be personally acquainted with a firewood merchant became the most signal blessing of heaven. And just as all sorts of people were looking for fuel, so all sorts began selling it, for it is one of the mysteries of commerce that as a commodity grows scarcer its sellers increase. Weird combinations of merchandise could be found at every street corner: old women sold vegetables and firewood together, weighing onions and logs on the same scales. No hostess could offer a more seductive inducement to visitors than “a good fire”.

The great game in restaurants was to devise a way of getting more than two courses. It was an ironic coincidence that the gastronomic craze which was to go to such fantastic lengths on the outbreak of peace first began to develop at the time of the food restrictions. Sometimes we are inclined to wonder whether it was not the restrictions themselves which made the subject of food of such overwhelming importance to people. Nothing is so seductive as a delicacy which cannot be obtained, and the tendency to despise ordinary household fare became more and more marked. Dining out became increasingly frequent, and prices soared in proportion.

Vainly the puritans raised their voices against the new times and manners. Their bitterest wrath was aroused by the tea-shops which were springing up everywhere in the city. They foamed at the mouth at the thought of throngs of people crowding round gimcrack tables stuffing themselves with cakes while the nation fought for its life.

But despite all the attempts to ostracize them, the tea-rooms increased in numbers and popularity, assisted, no doubt, by the ever-growing influx of foreign soldiers to the capital, and particularly by the advent of the Americans in 1917.

The tea-hour also coincided with the official time for issuing the day's bulletins, so that the tea-shops became the natural rendezvous for people discussing the news and trying to read between the lines of the sibylline *communiqués*, when these were not summed up in the now proverbial "All quiet on the Western Front". Rumour and speculation seethed round the steaming teapot and the underlying leitmotiv of it all was "How long is it going to last?" Naturally every man, and more particularly every woman had his or her own private channel of information, some very substantial personal grounds for believing this or that.

They discussed the strategic advantages of the respective battle-lines, the merits and demerits of all the ministers and all the generals, while everybody quoted from his favourite newspaper. And as all the latter repeated every morning what they had said the day before, there was, as may be imagined, little original speculation among all this gossip.

One of the most ludicrous instances of the sheep-like tendencies of democracy was the way in which the public applauded the most banal ideas disseminated by the officially instigated Press as conceptions of the greatest military genius and originality. Such dear old parrot-cries as "Our aim must be to isolate the Central Powers", and "We must divert the enemy to the East", were regarded as the supreme discoveries of military strategy, were seized upon and elaborated with such alacrity that everybody believed that he himself had discovered them, until M. Briand decided to make it quite clear that the credit was really his. "We must devote ourselves to the mass production of munitions." Surely the author of that magnificent and unexpected cry deserved well of his country? It is true that it took two years before any one thought of adding "and aircraft" to it. "Talk to no one

and suspect every one", that oracular pronouncement of M. Millerand's, was plastered up everywhere as if espionage had never been heard of before 1914.

Several references have already been made to the curious practice of "adopting" soldiers. It was not a bad idea in itself, for a national war protracted to such length, the extreme boredom of the trenches, and the number of unfortunates who were either friendless or whose families were too poor to send them the regular parcels of provisions and comforts which made life in the line just supportable, all made it desirable that some link should be established between those who were fighting for their country and the life they had left behind them. So it became the custom to write to company commanders asking for the names of lonely and friendless soldiers and to adopt one of them as a war-time "godson".

Like so many war-time institutions it was first seized on with enthusiasm and afterwards allowed to die of neglect. Women rushed in to write long and cheerful letters to lonely men at the front, and parcels of food and clothing were dispatched to grateful recipients. Men on leave who had no homes of their own went to stay with their "god-mothers", who showered amusements and favours on them in order to make them forget. At first the scheme was carried out in perfect propriety, but it was obvious that it contained potentialities likely to cause trouble in our frail human nature. The arrival of the soldier to find a young and seductive godmother waiting for him on the station became one of the standing stage jokes.

For it was inevitable that certain lonely feminine hearts should seek to find soul-mates by this heaven-sent means. By an amusing reversal of custom it was the lady whose desires became imperative, and the pursuit of handsome godsons became a favourite diversion of certain circles. One paper quite frankly offered its services in establishing relations between lonely charmers and the gallant airmen and officers of our Allies. The *Vie Parisienne*, Marcellin's old paper, which had been for fifty years one of the most amusing chronicles of the life of the boulevards, became suddenly the most widely circulated paper along the whole

Allied Front. Its charming ladies in undress, with more or less provocative labels, its light-hearted and impertinent stories, were the favourite decoration for dug-outs and the favourite reading of soldiers from the Channel to Verdun, and its small advertisements became the established medium by which the gallant battalions of Paris signified their appreciation of the gallant battalions of the Western Front. What these alliances lacked in permanence they undoubtedly made up for in ardour, and godmotherly embraces can seldom have been so warm and so satisfying.

It was the fashion to wear an engagement ring, one of those bands of shrapnel which the soldiers themselves cut out with their knives from exploded enemy projectiles.

The dearest hope of every one of these "godmothers" was to acquire a foreign officer, preferably an American. From the early days of the war various foreign uniforms had added a picturesque note to the streets of Paris. First there were the Belgians with their quaint red and gold caps which the women adopted as the fashion for a season. Then followed the crowds of English officers, whose smart kit was so very much admired. The gallantry of the Serbians touched all hearts, but the Russians were really the most popular of all the Allied troops with the French people, right down to the infamous treaty of Brest-Litvosk. For so many hopes had been placed upon the prodigious reserves of Russia; men had tried to number its incalculable potential soldiers, its magnificent cavalry, its indomitable infantry. "The Russian steam-roller", that beautiful *cliché* of the Press, had rolled its way over French good sense. "Five days, and then Berlin", was the slogan of that great Russian offensive which was to flow over the enemy like the sea through broken dykes. There was a genuine mystical element in this universal faith in Russia. The rare occasions when Russian troops actually marched through the city, their deep, sonorous voices chanting their sad, majestic songs, were among the most moving spectacles of the war.

It is a fact that all the troops who marched through Paris invariably received a frenzied welcome, for the



Government, solicitous as it was to preserve *morale* behind the lines by every means in its power, was curiously niggardly with one of the most effective, and gave Parisians very few opportunities of actually seeing the men who were fighting for them. This partly accounts for the frenzied reception given to the Americans on that beautiful fourth of July 1918, their Independence Day, when they marched down the Champs-Élysées beneath the chestnut trees. It was one continual ovation, from the Place du Trocadéro to the Place de la Concorde.

But if there were few organized marches, the streets of Paris were always full of the soldiers of the Allies, their numbers and variety increasing every year. A favourite meeting-place was the Café de la Paix at cocktail-time, when the representatives of a world at arms could be seen gathered round the tables.

The foreign soldier was also a very popular figure in the dance-halls, which had already begun to spring up like mushrooms. The arrival of the American, with his pockets bursting with dollars, ousted from their earlier supremacy the more handsome Australians and the more masculine Portuguese. The freedom with which the Americans spent their money not only marked them out as a prey for undesirables, but set a bad example to the whole of the civilian population. From their appearance dates the first sensational rise in the cost of living, which did not, unfortunately, fall with their departure.

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"Business as usual" raised a number of other problems: that of the slackers, which we have already referred to in connection with the first alarms of 1914, but which was more or less pressing throughout the whole period of hostilities. Then there was what was known as "the silk-stocking question" over which so much ink was spilled. And finally there were the war profiteers, who aroused the ire of the moralists and the envious admiration of the crowd.

Ardent patriots, feminine or middle-aged, still maintained that every individual not in the front-line trenches

with his breast exposed to the enemy's fire was a slacker. To be in any other form of national service, to be making munitions or carrying on an essential trade, was no excuse in their eyes. Staff officers, quartermasters, and aeroplane mechanics attached to hangars behind the lines were regarded with suspicion. The extent of this state of mind may be gauged from the fact that in one single quarter of 1915 over 30,000 letters of denunciation were received by the authorities in Paris. Little by little this insane suspicion abated, but it was always under the surface ready to break out again if any service or institution proposed to draft men from the front for other purposes, however essential.

The creation of the Press Bureau was an instance of this. With Clemenceau at their head, all the super-patriots fell upon this institution, which was afterwards shown to have played a determining part in the success of the Allies' propaganda. Inspected, sub-inspected, overwhelmed with orders and instructions, harried perpetually by confictory and countermanded orders, abused, denounced, and subjected to humiliating surveillance, the members of the propaganda mission lived in a state of perpetual apprehension. Politicians also took a hand in the game, and in 1918 the furious Clemenceau drove the general staff into the trenches, plunging the command into disorder for several weeks. But the super-patriots recked not of the consequences; their simple object was to drive all the people into the firing-line, only sequestering the aged and women and children.

The "silk-stocking question" was the problem of the women munition-workers who earned large salaries and spent them, it was said, almost exclusively on silk stockings and fur coats, to the shame and detriment of the race.

It was not without its element of truth, of course. It certainly was true that these women bought up all the best meat in the working-class quarters and raided the perfume and luxury departments of the less exclusive department stores. The craze for cheap luxury was not nearly so predominant as it was to become later, after the war, but the seed was germinating fast, and to

old-fashioned people and strict moralists the tendency was summed up by one article—silk stockings.

Skirts were becoming shorter and shorter, with the inevitable result that stockings became more and more important. The silk-stockings craze was not launched merely by feminine frivolity; its origin was in the sensual desires of men, proclaimed with the cynical outspokenness which was the key-note of the moment.

There remains to be considered the war profiteer. He had not yet taken shape as the vulgar rich man whom we were to know and to resent so keenly after the peace, but he was beginning to emerge from the shadow. Grocers, coal merchants, carpenters, and mechanics who had the acumen to convert their little workshops into shell-turning or other factories of war materials, lessees of cafés and restaurants, and a whole army of buyers and sellers were busy making money half suspected in the shade, like white ants carrying out their depredations in obscurity. From the suddenly enriched peasant to the pawnbrokers and moneylenders who preyed on the new poor and exploited the refugees, an army of people of every conceivable trade and profession were animated by a feverish desire for gain which turned all heads and stifled all consciences. This is the ultimate tableau of the war-time scene; a communal ditch in which all were equally up to their necks. The earlier efforts of the Revolution and the Directory were trifling by comparison with this wholesale orgy which was to be revealed in all its fullness when the curtain fell on the firing-line—when the Armistice was signed.

There was another aspect of this business of carrying on the war which must be dealt with here. What was Parliament doing all this time?

The record of its activities, particularly during the first three years of the conflict, is a sombre one. The politicians began well. They forswore party bickerings and formed themselves into the famous "Union Sacrée", determined to pull together and act as one man until the common purpose of the Allied armies in beating back and defeating the invader was achieved.

Whatever salutary effect this gesture might have had

upon the public was vitiated by the famous "flight to Bordeaux", and still more by the rumours which began to filter through regarding the junketings which were said to go on there. As for the "Union Sacrée", it was not very long before this began to dissolve into the usual party acerbities. The Socialists, who before the hostilities began had accepted the word of the German Social Democrats that the socialist faith knew no frontiers (the world knows with what alacrity these Germans responded to the call to arms), were the first to break the truce to party strife. They refused to vote the war credits, and were quickly labelled *defaitistes*.

Other groups followed their example, and in time anything like cohesion in the matter of ensuring the existence of a Government was out of the question. France had five Premiers during the war. M. Viviani, the first, found it impossible to carry on for any length of time in spite of his oratorical gifts and his personal magnetism. M. Briand, who was his Minister of Justice, succeeded him, but his silvery oratory and his power of persuasion failed him, and he went down in turn. M. Ribot, noted for his sincerity and courtly manners, formed the third War Cabinet, which practically died at its birth. Something like confusion among the politicians was now apparent. Decidedly the parliamentary machine was getting out of hand. It could not respond to the well-meant efforts made to secure its stability and smooth running. In addition to the intrigues inside the Chamber of Deputies there were forces at work outside which were seriously hampering Ministers. The organizers of some of these forces were quite candid as to the aim of their agitation, which was to bring the war to an end as speedily as possible, however inglorious this course would be for France and her Allies; others were suspect—so much that when M. Painlevé, the mathematician, was called to the premiership, he, knowing the sort of propaganda that was undermining the *morale* of the country, threatened to take action against the propagandists, however highly placed they might be. A man of tireless activity, a glutton for work, M. Painlevé essayed to achieve the impossible. The fortunes of war in the

rear and at the front were against him, and he fell in the darkest hour of the struggle, when the horrible fear was creeping into the hearts of Frenchmen and shrewd foreign observers that conceivably France might be put out of the war.

What was the actual situation at this grave moment in 1917? Sections of the French Army were discouraged to demoralization. There were desertions, insurrections, and executions. Behind the lines stop-the-war propaganda was in full swing. That vile sheet, the *Bonnet Rouge*, fed with German money, did considerable mischief before its publication was stopped, and its editor, Duval, the successor of the notorious Almereyda, who was supposed to have committed suicide in prison, was shot at Vincennes, as Mata Hari, the dancer, Bolo and Lenoir, convicted of working for Germany, were shot. Duval's execution was the end of the story of the cheque for a million francs which Marx, the Mannheim banker, sent to the *Bonnet Rouge*, but which was intercepted at the Swiss frontier. Both M. Ribot and M. Painlevé knew of the efforts, insidious and untiring, made to force France to abandon the struggle, and they did their utmost to frustrate them, but they could not get at the unseen forces that were working to paralyse the French effort.

Who at this moment of serious peril was the man best suited to carry on the Government and infuse vigour into the prosecution of the war? He was found in the man who had been the severest critic of the preceding Governments, who long before the war had established for himself an unenviable reputation as a smasher of Cabinets, a venomous fighter, a vitriolic writer, rude, gruff, and cynical of manner—no other than Georges Clemenceau.

Clemenceau made his bow to an excited and not entirely sympathetic Chamber: a Chamber, however, which was visibly beset by fear of the painful situation gradually becoming worse. He had no claims to oratory, but when he began to read his declaration of policy he compelled attention by the matter and manner of his speech. "*Je fais la guerre*," he declared with passion, and he soon let it be seen that his idea of making war was not merely to deliver

bellicose speeches in the Chamber and chastise with his mordant tongue deputies who did not agree with him. This rough-spoken septuagenarian with the bushy eyebrows, unruly white moustache and curious swiftly moving eyes with never a glimmer of a smile in them knew that he had two vital things to do: to inspire the Army with courage and to restore confidence in the rear. Even those Frenchmen who, remembering his past, could never bring themselves to admire him, had to admit that he accomplished both.

Clemenceau believed in the direct method. He took the argument from the Chamber to the Front, touring the lines, talking in his blunt way to officers and men, praising here, and exploding there, but impressing on every one the necessity for making war ruthlessly and single-mindedly. Whatever the exact military value of his recommendations and interventions, it cannot be denied that, like Lloyd George in England, he did an enormous amount to restore confidence, both in the line and behind it. In times of stress the human mind is simplified; it responds to the direct and the obvious, if only it is reiterated forcibly enough. And force had never been lacking in Clemenceau "the Tiger", now to be hailed as "*Père la Victoire*".

It was harder to deal with the civilians than with the soldiers. It was harder still to deal with the politicians. The climax was reached when, in a dramatic debate on the allegations of German influence within the Chamber itself, Clemenceau arraigned Joseph Caillaux. The latter, an able and level-headed man, defended himself in a two-hours' speech, but all the same he was arrested and taken to the Santé Prison. Whatever the merits or demerits of the Caillaux affair, it certainly taught the deputies that no one was immune. They no longer speculated as to how long Clemenceau would last. Most of them transferred their speculations nearer home.

Not that it was ever plain sailing for him. The constant seething of party hatred and suspicion was never entirely quelled. In a general sense he had the people with him, but he had few real friends. Many fervent patriots of the

Right could not forgive his former rabid anti-clericalism; many Radicals considered that he had betrayed his convictions, and many influential people were offended by his rough manners and essential egalitarianism. It was infuriating to them, when they called to see Clemenceau, to be turned over almost contemptuously to his secretary. This was Georges Mandel, who had been with him on *L'Homme Libre* (afterwards *L'Homme Enchaîné*), and in whom Clemenceau reposed the fullest confidence. Mandel, who afterwards became a very efficient minister, was in fact the real dictator of France during this period, giving orders on his own authority, keeping watch on the newspaper censorship, and even on the ministers themselves. He was one of Clemenceau's few intimates; he knew his mind and thought and acted for him. He did not even mind incurring the old man's displeasure.

Only a man of Clemenceau's temperament and energy, a born fighter, indifferent to criticism, stubborn as a mule, curt, suspicious and parsimonious with his confidence, and above all, sure of himself and of his policy, could have won through as Clemenceau did. Happily this was understood by the two other great Frenchmen who helped to engineer the final victory—Raymond Poincaré, the President of the Republic, and Marshal Foch, the Allied Commander-in-Chief. Greatly as their opinions in many respects differed from his, they recognized in him the force of will by which alone great things can be carried through. The dour Lorrain lawyer and the devout Catholic soldier stood with him to the end. Intriguers tried to upset him time and again; but he was too strong and too wily for them; the parliamentary game, which he had once played so cynically, had no traps for him.

He had his moments of anxiety. But even in 1918, when the Germans launched their last furious attack, when the banks sent their securities out of Paris to Bordeaux and Avignon; when there was talk of the Government removing again to Nantes, Tours, or Angers—the old war-horse refused to budge. "*Ils ne passeront pas.*" And they did not.

When the tide turned at last, and the Germans were

compelled to sue for an armistice, Clemenceau reached the pinnacle of triumph. He had saved the morale of France, he had brought her through to victory, and the Chamber which he had bullied, arraigned, and implored so often put it on record that he had *bien mérité de la patrie*.

Armistice was signed on that historic and radiant autumn day, November 11th 1918, which the whole world remembers. The weather was fine, with a little light mist, and from the moment that the city awakened it was waiting for the great news. About ten o'clock the rumour began to spread, and soon it was officially confirmed. Everybody seemed to know it at once. By some mysterious agency all work stopped; the doors of factories and workshops flew open as if struck by a magic wand and the whole population flocked out.

By common instinct they made for the boulevards in enormous crowds, growing larger as they approached the heart of the city. You saw them pour into the Place de la Concord, an irresistible mass fed by a hundred tributaries. They climbed upon the enemy cannons, gathered round the Strasbourg memorial, beat against the walls of the Tuileries—an immense, unorganized, intoxicated crowd, driven by a desire to shout, to cry aloud, to run or to climb up something. Every one was singing the "Marseillaise" or "Madelon"; when one group stopped another took up the refrain. A confused and terrifying clamour rose up, compounded of shouts and cheers, the exploding of fireworks, the shrieking of whistles and the excited cries of the women as they were seized and embraced. Now and then a salute from a cannon punctuated the confusion.

It went on until nightfall, when the first timid appearance of unveiled lamps brought back to Parisians the fact that their lights were being restored. Very sparingly, of course, but it seemed a dazzling illumination to people who for years had lived in a perpetual semi-darkness. A thunder of cheers broke out as the lamps were lit.

When night fell on the boulevards the scene was like a primitive orgy of unbridled licence and joy. Women slid



from one group to another, pressing up against the soldiers, offering themselves with a simplicity which drove out grossness and offence. Paris was beside itself.

The captured cannons in the Place de la Concorde witnessed the strangest scenes that night. Men sang and danced round them, addressed them with frenzied rhetoric, taunting them with their impotence. Women climbed upon them and fifteen or twenty men with the strength of frenzy drew them through the crowds. The wonder is that no one was injured, for the following morning the guns were found abandoned by the fortifications. In the cafés and restaurants there were junketings unparalleled, improvised dances in all the public squares. They leapt and shouted and danced to any kind of music, violins, trombones, accordions, and barrel-organs.

The nation was released!

## CHAPTER XVIII

### POST-WAR

THE jazz-band was playing. Banjoes, violins, clarinets, slide trombones, and pianos unchained the battery of rag-time, one-steps and blues, preposterous breathless music with a monotonous and elementary rhythm, nervous, chaotic, garish, like the symphony of manners which it introduced. The wail of the saxophone drowned all musical criticism; the world was given up to the macabre dance into which the negro players wreathed their hot and deliquescent fantasies. They were the conductors of the infernal rout in which Paris rocked and swayed.

Nobody wanted to do anything but dance, dance, and keep on dancing. Dancing at all the receptions, dancing at home, dancing in the hundreds of dance-halls that had sprung up on every side. Dancing in the restaurants, where people could no longer wait till the end of their dinner, but leapt up convulsively at the first blast of the orchestra. Dancing between the courses, dancing almost between mouthfuls, young couples, middle-aged couples, couples with white hair. There were more than two hundred schools of dancing in the capital alone, all advertising proficiency in ten lessons.

The jazz-band never slept. How many dance-clubs were there in Paris? More than anybody could compute, three or four next door to each other in one street, in every street. Most of them charged no entrance fee, but it was compulsory to order a bottle of champagne. You danced with anybody, dispensing with introductions. There were a number of handsome young professional dancers attached to the establishment for the purpose of entertaining elderly wallflowers, or young ones for that matter. You slid a note in their hands after half an hour or so and then passed on to another. Everybody passed on, to another partner, another table, another place!

How long did all this madness last? For months, years even. In fact it has hardly died down now.

After dancing, eating was the popular passion. People first began to display an inordinate interest in food when it was hard to get, but after the Armistice it became the fashion sedulously to cultivate gastronomy. There was a mad race between the restaurants, the dance-halls, and the banks to snap up every available site in the capital.

The exotic or the old-world was the favourite note in decoration. "Grill-rooms", "Gardens", and "plantations" were all the rage, but the genus "ancient hostelry" was the most popular of all. The walls of Paris bristled with all the curious fauna of gastronomic heraldry—the wild ducks, the prawns, the escargots, the chickens-in-pots, the red donkeys and the white horses of yester-year.

Inside, you took your meals beside great open fires with chicken and joints roasting on spits. Regional dishes were much in demand, everybody advertised Provençal, Flemish, Alsatian, or Marseillais cooking. Every diner imagined himself a Brillat-Savarin and entered into lengthy and florid discussions about the merits of the dishes. People compared notes, exchanged recommendations or warnings, and that celebrated gourmet, Louis Forest, founded the Club des Cent Kilos with the object of encouraging and promoting good living by compiling a register of good and bad restaurants.

Grocers, provision merchants, *restaurateurs* and wine-merchants had the time of their lives. Even the profits which they had amassed during the war at the expense of the simple American were as nothing to the harvest now coming into their hands. But who was not making money in those first mad months of the peace? Anybody who had anything to sell was making a fortune, for they could sell it at any price they liked. A rain of bank-notes flooded the Paris streets.

But the face of Paris still wore its exotic mask. Foreign uniforms still crowded the streets, recalling on every side the years we had just passed through. And a number of things which had sprung up during the war had taken permanent root and jarred the susceptibilities of old-fashioned Parisians.

The old horse-cabs, which were on the verge of disappearance in 1914, had now vanished completely and a horde of taxis plied on the streets, their numbers increasing as the French manufacturers began to emulate the production and sales methods of the Americans. For four or five years traffic piled up on the streets until it reached the chronic state of chaos which we suffer to-day.

Along the pavements in the centre of the town and in the vestibules of various buildings were a large number of stall-holders who had been licensed during the war and were still permitted to remain. Vendors of silk stockings, brassières, handkerchiefs, ice-cream, shoe-laces, socks, and footwear turned certain quarters of Paris—not excluding wholly some of the more elegant—into something resembling an Oriental bazaar or a public fair. It was not without its picturesque aspect, but it consorted ill with the former tone.

But the transformation of Paris was most marked in the Latin Quarter, where the student of pre-war years would have been hard put to it to recognize the haunts of his youth. Most of the famous old cafés had been turned into banks, or, where they survived, catered for a solid and respectable middle-class clientèle. The gay little ladies, once the pride of the quarter which Mürger immortalized, had disappeared as completely as if the streets had opened and swallowed them up. The long-haired, shabby students, those pillars of the *brasseries* shattering the world to bits over a bock, had joined them in the shades. A motley throng of foreigners, with Japanese predominating, emphasized here as elsewhere the cosmopolitanism of the capital. Students now had no time to loiter by the way; the hectic rush of modern life left no time for idling, and the hard necessity of earning a living forced the scholar to return to his work—which was quite often manual work—as soon as his course was ended.

Another feature of the post-war capital was the multiplication of banks and office buildings. It was as though the country had suddenly become industrialized all at once, and commercial inflations of the most preposterous

description were the order of the day. The modest little pre-war shop combined with its neighbours; the small department store extended itself; and the large ones formed chains all over the country. The banks assisted this idiotic aggrandizement here as all over the world and Parisian commerce gazed at itself in an immense deforming mirror which magnified everything that it reflected.

The first result was a housing shortage all over the country, which in Paris reached catastrophic proportions and caused the most extraordinary scenes. The curtain had now gone up upon the new rich, who emerged from their obscurity bulging with bullion and began to organize the great flat-hunt. They found themselves tenaciously opposed by adversaries bent on making them disgorge. The right to possession was sold with the most barefaced effrontery; people paid thousands of francs premium for the broken-down bed and old wardrobe which would enable them to obtain a tenacy. At the same time the cost of living soared to a fabulous height, for the new rich had become the arbiters of Parisian economy. And so they were to remain for five or six years.

Where did they come from, all these people, bursting with their curiously acquired gains? From obscure little places behind the lines where they had followed half a dozen more or less reputable occupations; from the big industrial towns which had been transformed into colossal armament factories; from ports where they had traded with the Allies; from frontier towns where they had engaged in dubious commerce with neutrals; or simply from Paris, where, for the last two years, it had been the easiest thing in the world to exchange goods of any sort for money.

But wherever they came from, whether they were young or old, fat or lean, married or unmarried, their ways were the same, their manners identical and their idiocies similar. They were possessed by a mad desire to enjoy life which they could only translate in terms of spending money. They lived in a perpetual whirl of feasting and dissipation which was remarkable even in the post-war rout. It was the same phenomenon which

had been witnessed under the Directory, but magnified a hundredfold, a thousandfold.

The profiteers were not confined to Paris or the large industrial towns; they were to be found in the most remote and unexpected places. The peasantry had amassed considerable sums during the war and were still making substantial profits. Legend represented every one of them as a Crœsus in wooden shoes and one of the post-war revues staged a troop of peasant women clad in the latest shriek of fashion with silk-stockinged legs and pearls round their necks, guarding that source of incalculable riches—a herd of cows.

The uncertainty of everything, the soaring cost of living, the mania for luxury among people who were poor yesterday and rich to-day, ushered in the new era of the omnipotence of Mammon.

The Panama and Gold Rush booms fade into complete insignificance beside the insane orgy of gambling which inspired the world between the years 1919 and 1927. In Paris everybody had something at stake, from the great capitalist down to the charwoman; everybody watched the rise and fall of prices daily with feverish eyes.

Prices began to soar rapidly and new millionaires were born every day on the pavements. Little stockbrokers' clerks of eighteen and thereabouts were netting two hundred thousand francs a year, rolling round in their cars, keeping fancy women, and crowding the luxury restaurants—seeing life! The mad chase for fortune lasted up till 1923—the year of the crash and all its consequent upheavals—but even then speculation, although more circumspect, was scarcely less intense.

The new economic conditions brought about by the fall of the franc pressed particularly hardly upon the professional and official classes. Those decorous administrative positions with their fixed salaries and provision for superannuation, formerly the objective of every Frenchman, had entirely lost their appeal. The ambition of every one now was to be an "agent" for something.

Everybody wanted to be the middleman, and the necessity of repairing the national industrial equipment,

of restoring the devastated areas, reinstating building operations, and providing raw materials, gave ample opportunity. A shrewd and clear-headed man could find plenty of harassed industrial concerns ready to pay him a handsome commission if only he could deliver the goods. Who wouldn't be a middleman in such circumstances? What young man would not forsake the desk of dull routine, his honourable but badly remunerated profession, to join in the gold rush so easily pursued in the streets of Paris? Promising young aspirants to the Bar and the learned professions forsook universities and chambers to become agents, restaurant lessees, and professional dancers.

The new generation was active, ingenious, unscrupulous, and very hard-headed where its personal interests were at stake. It had no intention of stagnating at an official desk, year in year out. It wanted liberty of action, freedom, enterprise. For it, to travel was infinitely better than to arrive. Not that it didn't mean to arrive, however.

The means were ready to the hand. The motor-car became suddenly the key of heaven. What could be better than to fly along the open road, free from the daily grind, far from the corrosion of worry and the mere boredom of life, intoxicated by speed, freedom, the rush of air—and still more speed! Yes, the motor-car was the universal panacea. Men struggled to acquire one, and struggled to keep it when they had. The manufacturers could not keep pace with the demand; their thousands of workmen had not got hands enough. Every spring the new output, commissioned far in advance, was pounced upon by a horde of eager buyers.

The main country roads became almost as crowded as the Paris streets and the flock of cars returning on Sunday nights became a regular weekly ritual. Those who had no cars contented themselves with the trains. People travelled at all times and at all seasons.

The sentiment must have been universal judging from the hordes of visitors which trains, liners, and aeroplanes deposited in Paris. The capital was invaded by all the races in the world—English, Spanish, American, Dutch,

and Argentines—and the roads were further crowded by their cars as they sped off to spas, watering-places and other fashionable resorts. In some of these places the indigenous inhabitants became merely “the French colony”. In Cannes, during the season, the traffic was regulated by English policemen specially imported from across the Channel.

Paris now set to work to amuse all these visitors, most of whom did not understand a word of French. The music hall saved the situation, for what could be more suitable for such an audience than an entertainment where words were anyhow quite superfluous?

And so the music hall became the most advertised diversion of the city. Fortunes were spent on it, and still larger fortunes made out of it. The extravagance of its spectacles during this period almost beggars description. Here was staged the world under seas, with huge fishes swimming in and out of coral reefs, armies of crabs and lobsters looking like Chinese soldiers, and an enormous octopus who seized the beautiful ladies of the ballet in his waving velvet arms. Or perhaps it would be Venice in the time of Longhi and Casanova, with its canals and lagoons, its gondolas and moonlight, its lovers and its undercurrent of music. Or it might be the Roman arena, with beautiful naked martyrs crucified over glowing coals, writhing under the lash, or fleeing from ardent gladiators. The whole pageant of history was ransacked for pretexts.

All this sumptuous pageantry was nevertheless only a background for the stars. For Mistinguett, descending a golden staircase under a flood of converging limelight, step by step with the exaggerated dignity of the music hall queen. Or for Maurice Chevalier, impudent, careless, and nimble, the idol of the typists and the shop-girls. Or for Harry Pilcer, that elegant virtuoso of the dance, or for that very genuine artist Grock in the well-remembered pantaloons so much too big for him. Or for the Dolly Sisters, or for Raquel Meller, or the Gertrude Hoffman girls or Elsie Janis. Or just for one of those beautiful naked show-girls posed upon a pinnacle of graceful bodies.



These were the idols of Paris and the wonder of the world. And their salaries were commensurate.

To them must be added the first vintage of the cinema stars—Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, Charlie Chaplin, Max Linder, Norma Talmage, and Pearl White. For the cinema had come out into the limelight of popularity. People had developed the habit during the war and were not disposed to let it drop. Cinemas sprang up on every side, no longer the unpretentious little halls of yesterday, but sumptuous palaces with decorations almost as exotic as the contemporary music hall spectacle, sometimes medieval, sometimes oriental, sometimes submarine, and more often heaven knows what.

In the theatres, musical comedy still had it all its own way. The war-time popularity had become so firmly entrenched that it seemed as though nothing could stop it. The airs from such favourite shows as *Phi-Phi* and *Pas sur la bouche* were ground out by every orchestra and every gramophone in every café and restaurant.

The song-writers and their composers were also making fortunes. Their method was to engrave a tune on the memory of the audience, to reiterate it until people could not get it out of their ears, to "plug" it till it drove you almost to fury. The words were thrown on to a screen, while the band seductively discoursed the air and the singer coaxed the audience to join in. This "song plugging" was invariably successful. Nobody protested against it; everybody took it in good part. Post-war audiences were extraordinarily tolerant; they had the leniency and good humour of people just released from an intolerable nightmare.

The cult of mere novelty as such, another result of the great upheaval, produced an army of impresarios who scoured the world for new artistic sensations which they could impose upon their public. M. Jacques Hébertot turned the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées into an enormous experimental station, a laboratory where new and unexpected entertainments emerged from the crucible.

First the Russian Ballet returned to regain the applause of Paris. Then followed the Swedish Ballet with Jean

Borlin, its pure Northern music coming like a cool draught to fevered palates. Anna Pavlova rose to the lonely heights of genius with her interpretations of the Dying Swan, but Bolshevism had already made its appearance in the world of art. The discordant clamour of Erik Satie and the Six affronted conventional ears, and the eccentricities of *Parade* shocked the first-night audience so much that the presentation almost became a fixed battle between the opposing factions. And the deep voices of the Ukrainian choirs sang the elegy of their ruined world.

But the jazz-band went on playing.

The negro invasion was at its height, headed by that extraordinary phenomenon Josephine Baker, the black Bacchanté, the unchained primitive savage who led the frenzied cohorts of the post-war world.

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The Latin Quarter was not the only part of the town to suffer change and eclipse in the years following 1914. The boulevards themselves were virtually dead. The life of the city had gone farther west, and the Champs-Élysées had begun to show the inroads of trade. Montmartre had lead in its wings; only a few very commercialized attractions remained to divert the more unsophisticated of the tourists.

Montparnasse, on the other hand, leapt into the vacant limelight. It had begun to emerge from obscurity during the war when Apollinaire discovered a humble little bar whose Vouvray was delicious. There Lenin and Trotsky had planned the campaign which was to change the face of half the world, surrounded by a miscellaneous crowd of artists and hangers-on of all races and colours. The Café de la Rotonde had opened its doors.

The lessee was a certain Libion, a jovial, lame, white-haired man in a perpetual black overcoat. He was on familiar terms with everybody, knew all his clientele by heart, and turned a blind eye on the cocaine-selling that went on in the corners.

"Montparnasse," said its devotees, "is the centre of the

world", and it must be a fact that such a motley assortment of races can seldom have been gathered together—Hindus, Japanese, Dutchmen, and Chinese, with here and there an authentic Redskin entertaining an equally authentic Parisienne.

Cubism was the new artistic snobbery. All the Cubists were there: Kisling in his dirty overall with his iron bracelets round his wrists, and Vlaminck roaring with laughter in a corner. This Bohemian of the old guard, who had been a professional cyclist and a performer in a night-club band, had sounded all the heights and depths of experience but remained always the same jovial companion. In another corner sat the taciturn Picasso. When peace was restored, all these people, save those whom the war had removed, found themselves back in a setting more exotic than ever. The Dome and the Coupole, adjacent subsidiaries of the Rotonde, were equally crowded by this perpetual cosmopolitan carnival. These folk painted. At least, they exhibited. Or, more exactly still, they made a living out of art, sometimes a fortune. Many of them drew substantial sums from the picture-dealers to whom they had sold the whole of their future output. For art, like everything else during the war, had become commercialized. The high prices realized by certain modern pictures had demonstrated to the artists and the dealers that painting was as good a field for "market operations" as any other. Prices could be made to rise or fall by adroit manipulation and numbers of agents at once set to work to exploit the possibilities of the new graft.

It was quite an easy business. All it wanted was a little capital. You bought, with a little discrimination, the entire output of a young painter, stored it until the appointed time, and then suddenly revealed it to an admiring world for sale at fancy prices. The art dealer became the nurse, almost the mother, of his foundlings. But the chosen had to keep their noses to the grindstone. Woe betide the idle apprentice; his means of subsistence would soon be cut off.

The pursuit of cash was continued everywhere just as feverishly. The writers were not quite so lucky as the

painters, but then, what a flood of books there was! When the world had stopped dancing, it read. Always novels. Housewives, shop-girls, dressmakers, servants, the reinforcements of the legion of romance-devourers flocked in. It was only to be expected that the speculative element showed itself here also. The *édition de luxe* lent itself to shrewd dealers just as the canvases did, for its price also could be forced up and down at will. Sometimes prices rose to a fabulous level and collectors and speculators bought editions on vellum, rice paper, rag paper, numbered and signed by the author, and what not, just as they bought porcelain, pictures, and furniture. But they gambled in everything during this epoch of folly. Jewels, china, furniture, and bibelots all changed hands continually, were sold and resold, forced up and cried down, held back and put into circulation again.

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The war-time influx of women into all trades and professions was by now established as a permanent feature of social life. The women were everywhere, and they had succeeded in adapting themselves so well that they threatened to oust the men from many occupations. They had got into the Civil Service and not only crowded the lower ranks of the executive but were also to be found with their feet on the administrative ladder. To-day they were secretaries; to-morrow they might be departmental chiefs. And after that? Everything seemed to be open to them. They were conductors on the tramways and on the Métro, where they still wore the policeman's cap they had adopted in 1914. Some of them even drove taxis and motor-lorries without exciting any comment. For the ravages of the war upon the male population were such as to render the women indispensable.

The shortage of men had put husbands at a premium. Sought after, pampered, and almost openly pursued, men began to impose new conditions and strictures upon their companions just as the latter were celebrating their escape from the old ones. Men and women had both grown during these last few years, but they had not grown

together. Now that they were face to face again, each discovered the other to be harder, more resolute, and more antagonistic.

Another post-war trait worth noting is the virtual disappearance of drunkenness among the lower classes and its accession to more exalted social circles. Hard drinks were all the fashion and cocktails were almost the staple food of youth. Young girls drank two or three before lunch and heaven knows how many were consumed in a fashionable household during the course of the day. Obviously there were advantages in having one's own bar, and so sprang up the formidable array of cabinets and counters and little rooms fitted up with shelves and high stools and all the appurtenances familiar to the habitual consumers of pink gins and more exotic mixtures.

With the increasing palate for violent drinks went an increasing taste for violent sports. An enormous stadium was opened at Colombes to accommodate the growing crowds that flocked every Sunday to the football matches. The women were just as noisy and enthusiastic as the men; just as unsporting also, when the home team failed to win. Tennis was practised day and night on grass courts and hard courts with intensive fury, and winter sports monopolized the months of December and January. But the mania of the town was for boxing, and the fashionable of both sexes flocked to the ring to blink with brutal sadistic joy at the frenzied struggles beneath those blinding lights.

Violence, bitterness, speed! These are the key-notes of the life we lead to-day. Our over-strung nerves need more and more violent stimulus to wring a single vibration from them. Whatever we do, we fling ourselves into it with fanatic intensity; we demand to be whirled along the road or in the air, to be plunged in work at high pressure, to drink pleasure dry and to be spurred by thrill after thrill until the human machine collapses. From the time he gets out of bed the town dweller is caught up like a fly on the wheel, and when he returns at night, weary and exhausted, it is to listen to the clanging of the telephone and the babble of the radio.

He is mummified in matter, for, by the irony of life, that progress of which he is so proud has not lifted any of his burdens but has strapped them more firmly on his back. His imperious desires, multiplied a hundredfold, drive him like a galley slave to find the means of their fulfilment, and the infinite complications of modern life press round him like iron bands. Everywhere in this age of "freedom" he is more oppressed. Legislation, regulations, taxation, and prohibitions hedge him in on every side. All his activities are supervised, checked, and spied on as never before in the history of civilization. This is the supreme paradox: man in trying to free himself has everywhere riveted his chains. He longs for liberty, space, and silence, yet not for a king's ransom would he tear himself from his clamorous hell. "Paris is becoming impossible," chorus its citizens. But how many of them would ever dream of leaving it?

This transformation of life must not be wholly attributed to the war; it was due in no small part to the unsatisfactory solutions of the Peace problems, to the bungling of politicians. No review of life in France during the last sixty odd years would be complete without a survey, however cursory, of the efforts made by international statesmen to construct a new and better world in which war would be for ever banned, and of the doings of the men elected to the Chamber of Deputies.

The Peace Conference transformed Paris into an international city, filling it with unaccustomed colour, gaiety, and excitement. Paris rose to the occasion and provided, with more or less success, for the varied wants of the great inflow of foreigners come to make peace. The delegations came with nicely defined ideas as to the peace that ought to be made and the share of the spoils that should fall to their countries. It was never expected that the drawing up of the peace terms would be an easy matter, but few of the plenipotentiaries imagined, when they set foot in Paris, that the difficulties encountered would be so numerous or so serious. It soon became apparent that there were far too many peacemakers. Most of them with notions of how the Central Powers should be dealt with

were never given a chance to express themselves. But what they could not accomplish in the bosom of the Conference they attempted to achieve by intriguing outside.

Even the Peace Council, limited to ten members, five Premiers and five Foreign Ministers, could not get rid of the state of confusion that had been created by the Babel of warring tongues, by the demands which incessantly poured in upon it from all sides. The Council was reduced to four, and finally it was the Big Three, Mr. Lloyd George, M. Clemenceau, and President Wilson, totally dissimilar in temperament and outlook, who drew up the Treaty, such as it was, which was ultimately presented to the Germans and signed by all the parties concerned.

Clemenceau was right when, before the Peace Conference began, he spoke of "this terrible business of making peace". What relief, what frenzied joy, when the Big Three, their task ended, emerged from the Hall of Mirrors in the château at Versailles and were mobbed by an unbridled crowd and hailed as the saviours of the world! Little did these delirious people of all nationalities imagine on that sultry day in June 1919 what troubles were to follow the work of the peacemakers. Lloyd George, Clemenceau, and President Wilson, who had somehow come to be regarded by Frenchmen as the personification of aloofness, were speedily disillusioned, the "Tiger" most of all.

The opportunity came to crown Clemenceau's work for France by sending him to the Élysée. Very reluctantly he consented to stand for the Presidency of the Republic, but there was opposition to him led by his enemy Briand, who induced the debonair Paul Deschanel, President of the Chamber who had thrilled the deputies by an eloquent speech, to become a candidate. The dress rehearsal of the election at the Senate showed which way the wind was blowing, and Clemenceau withdrew his candidature rather than suffer defeat. That was the end of his turbulent public life, his "reward" for his war services, and he retired, accepting nothing, save a symbolical work of art

representing a tiger crushing an eagle presented to him by the Paris Municipal Council. When he died his family even refused a State funeral, and his body was practically smuggled out of Paris in the dead of night for burial at his birthplace in his beloved Vendée.

Had he lived the "Tiger" would have had many opportunities of gloating over his political adversaries, become ministers, because of the blunders they committed. Millerand, his successor, obstinate, a little dour, but strong, a courageous Premier and Foreign Minister, was forced to the Élysée against his will, and hounded out of it by the Radicals and Socialists because he refused to content himself with being a figurehead. The silver-tongued Briand was given more than one chance, but many Frenchmen felt that Lloyd George had got the better of him in the discussions at Cannes on the Peace settlement, that the "Welsh wizard" had hypnotized him on the golf-course, and he was summoned to Paris and had to resign.

Poincaré once more. The ex-President had donned his lawyer's gown and taken up his pen, writing articles in *Le Temps* and the *Revue des deux Mondes* on the necessity of making Germany pay. Again he had the urge to become the central figure in the Parliamentary arena, and his ambition was gratified. As Premier he spent his Sundays in delivering speeches against Germany's bad faith. But he did more than talk. He acted. When Germany openly defaulted in her reparation payments he surprised the world and angered Britain by sending French troops, joined by Belgian soldiers, to occupy the Ruhr industrial basin. "A foolhardy enterprise," said the foreign critics of French policy. "Reparations will never be obtained in that way." But Poincaré found means of working the mines, factories, and railways and obtaining what he called his "productive pledges" in spite of Germany's disastrous policy of passive resistance.

It was Herriot, brought to power by a change-over which frequently occurs in France, who put an end to the occupation of the Ruhr and incidentally killed the Bloc National. The Radicals and Socialists had perfected





MR. LLOYD GEORGE TEACHING M. BRIAND TO PLAY GOLF AT CANNES



their electoral organizations to such an extent as to enable them to sweep away their opponents in many constituencies. But a Nemesis attended the policy of the Radical Government of pulling down and of rebuilding after its own fashion. An orgy of expenditure was begun. Cracks appeared in the financial edifice. The note circulation was increased. The country had to be calmed down. It was told that there would be no inflation, and there were hints of proceedings against those who uttered that awful word, thus provoking what the newspapers called a "crisis of confidence". But inflation came all the same and at a vertiginous rhythm in July 1926. The country was racing towards bankruptcy. Astonishing scenes were witnessed during the inflation period. People rushed to spend what money they had, buying clothes, jewels, furniture, houses, motor-cars, and many other things of which they had no immediate need, and eating and drinking of the best. The thing was to get something for their money at the moment lest it would have no value on the morrow.

When at last the franc fell to two hundred and forty to the pound and the ugly fact leaked out that the State coffers were virtually empty, there being only a bare million francs to carry on the services of the country, Paris was seized with panic. There were ebullitions of despair and indignation; demonstrations, with notes of tragedy in them, in front of the Chamber of Deputies. The angry populace clamoured for the resignation of the Radical-Socialist Government, which was blamed for having brought the country to bankruptcy and ruin. Édouard Herriot, the Premier, a very estimable man in many respects, well-meaning, scrupulously sincere, but singularly unfortunate as head of the Government, saw the writing on the wall, and offered his resignation to M. Gaston Doumergue, the President of the Republic. The President, however, took the view that the head of the Government should shoulder his responsibilities. Herriot could only follow this advice, and he fell in a rather inglorious fashion.

It was generally agreed by the public that there was only one man who could get the country out of its

terrible mess—Raymond Poincaré—and he accepted the heavy task offered to him on one condition, that all the groups in the Chamber should face up to their responsibilities and be represented in the new Government of National Union. Like drowning men the politicians, on top, but now cowed, were ready to grasp at any straw, and all, with the exception of the Socialists, eagerly accepted Poincaré's invitation. Party antagonisms were stilled, and under the Premier's strong lead the new Government set to work to restore the country's finances.

For two years France knew what it was to live under a real Parliamentary dictator who never minced words and kept his gaze steadily fixed on the goal before him. Drastic things had to be done, and Poincaré did them. Taxation was increased enormously, expenditure in State departments was cut down ruthlessly, and these exactments, together with the institution of reforms with economy as their object and made possible by decree-laws, were accepted by the country without audible murmurs of dissent.

Looking back on that terrible crisis in the affairs of France all Frenchmen of dispassionate judgment had at that time a profound admiration for the genius, the patriotism, and the unselfishness of the great Lorrain, who put in two of the hardest years of his well-filled life in the service of France. Never was the crack of a dictator's whip more readily obeyed. There were eloquent reasons for every move he made. He seemed to work by time-table, got the right men to do the right things in his way, and in the end the country had the satisfaction of seeing his task brought to a successful conclusion.

Very hard years they were for Frenchmen living under crushing taxation and ever reminded of the soaring cost of living. But in spite of the heavy sacrifices they were called upon to bear they were not unhappy under Poincaré's dictatorship. At any rate they lived in an atmosphere of growing national confidence free from political upheavals which had upset the country's equilibrium in the past and which were destined to destroy it in the years to come. When the Government of National Union

came to an end the old system of party rule, which means that the interests of parties come before the interests of the State, was revived and in time Poincaré's heritage created by wise statesmanship was dissipated, and the country found itself faced with a Budget deficit of £150,000,000.

The Left parties, more than ever determined to exercise domination, athirst for power, soon forgot the bitter experience of 1926, and appealed to the country for its confidence. The Right and Centre parties made strenuous efforts to resist the Radical and Socialist onslaughts, which became fiercer at each succeeding appeal to the country. The pendulum was always swinging during these years. The electors were in a quandary, not knowing what parties would be able to do the best for France. André Tardieu, a vigorous politician with ideas, who was a member of Clemenceau's War Cabinet and of Poincaré's Government of National Union, got his chance on two occasions and drew up programmes of national reconstruction. But the Radical Socialists detested him and conspired against him with such vehemence that he was brought down each time before he had the opportunity of fulfilling the promises in his declarations of policy.

The series of notoriously short-lived Ministries, the inability of the politicians to make any headway in grappling with the country's urgent problems, produced two effects never dreamt of when the Peace Treaty was signed:

- (1) A large and ever-increasing body of Frenchmen, disgusted with the politicians whom they considered were out for party spoils instead of furthering the interests of France, were fast losing their faith in the efficacy of the Parliamentary institutions, but clung to the hope that the tide would turn and that a statesman of the calibre of Poincaré would arise and by his strength and wisdom give the country what it needed—settled government and a chance to make progress.
- (2) An equally large, probably larger, number of Frenchmen, convinced that the régime had failed to justify

itself and that no good purpose was to be served by the existing Parliamentary institutions, formed themselves into associations with varying aims, some labelled Fascists, bent on renovation, others, Communists and Socialists, frankly revolutionary.

We now see the beginning of internal dissension which became more deep-seated with the passing of the years and has been the serious preoccupation of every Government since 1930. The Communists, who had captured a large section of the Socialist Party and its machinery at the famous Congress at Tours, were assisted in their propaganda by subsidies from the Soviet. Their growing strength portended danger and had formidable reactions. It served to infuse new life into the Royalist movement, giving its members, the "Camelots du Roi", mostly young men, pretexts for organizing counter-demonstrations up and down the country which not infrequently ended in riots and bloodshed. Quite a number of other organizations, all bent on changing the face of France, sprang into being. Of these the strongest are the Federation of Ex-Combatants and Colonel de la Rocque's Croix de Feu, which latter, repudiating the allegation of being Fascist, speedily obtained a membership of half a million men determined to change the ways of the politicians.

The Communists and Socialists, aware of the powerful forces that would be arrayed against them if it came to a clash, found it expedient to sink their differences and join hands. So they formed themselves into a *Front Commune*, to which a section of the Radical Socialist Party under Édouard Daladier was not unsympathetic.

Daladier was the sorriest of all the Left post-war Premiers. He it was who got rid of Jeanne Chiappe, the little Corsican, the most energetic, not to say smartest, Prefect of Police that Paris had known.

It was under Daladier's premiership that the Stavisky scandal reached its climax, filling the people with despair and disgust which culminated in the riots in the Place de la Concorde in the early days of February 1934 and the killing of ex-combatants outraged in their sentiments of

honour and patriotism. A few years previously the financial scandal in which that amazing woman, Madame Marthe Hanau and her *Gazette du Franc* were involved, had shocked the country, but it paled into insignificance compared with the Stavisky affair, in which politicians, judges, and newspaper directors were compromised, and thousands of people, lured into investing and losing their money in what was termed the "Bayonne Pawnshop" were ruined. The painful recital of Stavisky's colossal swindles and how they had been made possible by the alleged connivance of persons in high places had infuriated the populace, and the fury was increased by the treatment meted out to the efficient Prefect of Police. That Chiappe's conduct on that occasion was approved by Paris is shown by the fact that he was subsequently elected to the Presidency of the Municipal Council.

Daladier put up a stout defence, but he did not escape the censure of the people and all that this implied. Unlucky Radical Socialist Party! It was accused of plunging the country into a crisis infinitely more serious than that of 1926 when Édouard Herriot was at the head of the Government. A man had to be found to clear away the mess, to form another Government of National Union, and Gaston Doumergue, who had been a very popular President of the Republic, was called from his retirement to undertake the task. He brought to his thankless job the spotless reputation of a patriot. Such was the contrition of the politicians that he could have done anything with them. How they would have obeyed the crack of another dictator's whip! But Doumergue was too mild and amiable a man, too much of a stickler for Parliamentary forms, to do the seemingly harsh things that the situation of the country demanded. His disarming smile was not enough; he lacked the necessary courage, and he lost his opportunity. The men of the Left, taking advantage of his amiability, got over their fright, plucked up courage, resumed their old tactics, and Doumergue was beaten and returned to his retreat. Étienne Flandin, his successor, as vigorous as he is big, did his best but he was hampered by the motor-car

accident in which he sustained a smashed arm. Then the task of placating the Left was too much for him and he had to give place to Pierre Laval, whose Government was given semi-dictator's powers for a few months. Poincaré, or a statesman like him, would have demanded more freedom of action, and he would have got it.

Amid all these changes and vacillations in the Parliamentary domain, amid all that has happened between 1870 and this year of grace 1935, one stern fact stands out. France has lost her happiness and her smile of other days. Paris is still a city of light, but where is the gaiety, the insouciance, the joy of living which distinguished the city in the past and lured to it foreigners in their tens of thousands? Gone. Paris soon became a *tristé* city after the depreciation of English and American currencies and the slump in the tourist traffic, and threatens to remain so until something like equalization in international money values has been restored, until internal strife is ended and the people can live, labour, and prosper under a stable parliamentary régime.



## CONCLUSION

THE physical transformation of Paris since 1871 is nothing compared with the change in manners and social life during this period. French society is in process of evolution—or should we say dissolution—at a rate which is daily accelerating. Survivors of the last days of the Second Empire can still look upon corners of the town which they have known from childhood and find them superficially unchanged, but they can never strike a single responsive chord in the manners, habits, and ideas of to-day. The places have changed but little: the men are another race.

The thing which one encounters at every turn, the thing which seems to dominate and determine every activity of the day, is the desire to live rapidly. Travel is swift and breathless. Whether bent on business or pleasure people rush about grimly; no one idles any more in the streets of Paris. Not that it is peculiar to Paris or to France; it is the accepted pace of all the world. Perhaps the Parisian has succumbed to it more easily than others because he is by nature vivacious and alert, swift of speech, and rapid of gesture.

The result of all this is an instability which manifests itself in every department of life and ideas. Ministers rise and fall in bewildering succession; a capricious electorate throws up and pulls down a score of politicians every term. Democracy is a great devourer of men, and it always gets its ration.

This constant flux is not only affecting individuals; it is attacking institutions. Under the guise of social reform and amenity fresh legislation is piled up every session, the last law cancelling the preceding and enduring only a short space before it is itself superseded. Regulations and restrictions multiply with apparently no guiding principle but the method of trial and error. When we consider the formidable mass of laws regarding traffic, housing, and social insurance, what single logical principle can be isolated from them? All are tentative, experimental, and

built on sand, all dubiously workable to-day and hopelessly out of date to-morrow.

In the sphere of morals we can only say that the traditional virtues of prudence and integrity have declined progressively since the Panama revelations, but that since the war the decline has accelerated beyond belief. Scandal after scandal is disclosed before a public whose leniency is even affecting the law-courts, where the punishment of offenders becomes ever lighter and lighter. For what is good, and what is evil? The line of demarcation has worn thin in the public consciousness, and never has the frontier been so easy to cross.

But it is in the realm of economics that confusion reigns supreme. Prices rise and fall without apparent reason, with no discoverable arbiter but the fluctuations of human avarice and desire. What does the public want to-day? And what will it want to-morrow? How can any one know; it doesn't even know itself. It is a straw blown as the wind lists. And the wind is generated by its own churning ambitions and desires.

The French, and more particularly the Parisians, have become used to shrugging off the complications of modern life. They have supported an orgy of public expenditure which has dislocated the national budget; an orgy of sport which has encroached upon our ideas and our intelligence; an orgy of tumult and speed which makes it impossible to cross the street in safety. They have endured successive revelations of parliamentary dishonesty, they have suffered four years of war. They have even suffered the peace. Only one thing has any power to disturb our consciousness or arouse our interest, and that is Money. For It our lives have been turned upside down and our leisure and serenity destroyed; for It our women go down to the hustings, our youth abandons its studies, its apprenticeships, and the agreeable idling of the formative years. For It we abandon our honourable professions for dubious dealing; to It we burn incense without end.

No wonder that the Paris we knew has vanished. All that contributed to its particular charm has gone: the modest and simple pleasures, the careless, loitering life of

the Boulevards, the inexpensive living, and the existence of a society where wit and intelligence were qualities that counted. All these have gone now; we are lucky if we can walk along the streets without being pushed off the pavement and run over. The money that we seek so furiously is just as frantically disbursed. We rush out on our Sundays and week-ends to enjoy ourselves at top pressure. Silence or calm is anathema to us.

Europe has decided to conduct her life to the *tempo* of the American symphony, and we of France have only fallen into step with all the rest. But because we have always been a country of small property owners and citizens with modest tastes and ideals the change inevitably seems more radical here than in London, Berlin, or Milan. But we have somehow adapted ourselves to it. We have survived these ever-recurring difficulties and crises, and we have even managed to make fun of them. So perhaps, after all, we can still sing the song they sang after the troubles of 1870:

V'la le travail qui r'prend  
Esperance, confiance.  
V'la le travail qui r'prend  
Paris sera toujours grand.





